The **future** of **electronic entertainment** issue#109

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Miyamoto intervie…
Xbox Japan trouble
Previewed: Crazy T…
GunValkyrie, Twin C…
Tekki, Die Hard: Ve…
Reviewed: Wreckles…
Broken Sword, Bloo…
State of Emergency
Game Easter Eggs…

Videogames are pointless. Discuss.

Why academics and the mass media still see you as a silly child playing silly games





Don't act so shocked, you've suspected it all along. If there's one argument that continually gets levelled at your pastime by the cognoscenti it's one that invariably and ultimately focuses on the irrelevance of gaming: its absolute futility; its absurdly one-dimensional subject matter; its inability to offer anything approaching cultural worth.

It's a flawed argument, of course, put forward by individuals clearly happy to dismiss an entire medium of which they have little to no understanding. Individuals that have never taken the trouble to experience *Rez*, *Ocarina of Time* or *Ico*, to name the first three that come to mind. And that never will.

But, as you'll find out about on page 54, certain members of the academic world already have taken the trouble and, crucially, they've not only acknowledged the significance of videogaming but are also busy propelling the message. Intellectual recognition is vital for gaming's sustained attempt to break into the mainstream consciousness. Without it, gaming will continue to lack the credibility to do so.

That's largely because without intellectual recognition, other media will continue to ignore videogaming. Forget Lara Croft on the cover of 'The Face' – gaming remains a long, long way from receiving fair treatment from the general press. It's not so much that, as in society's higher cultural circles, only a handful of journalists seem qualified to properly approach the subject, but rather the incessant prejudicial barriers erected by individuals incapable of regarding videogaming as anything other than a puerile activity at best, and a psychosis-inducing engagement at worst. Press Ganged (p64), **Edge**'s evaluation of the state of mainstream press videogame coverage, is unlikely to be remembered as one of the magazine's most positive articles.

In fact, the entire issue is a little negative – it's been a typically 'post-Christmas, pre-Easter' month. And it all began with the visit to Skywalker Ranch which is still far (far) away – evidently much further than anticipated.
Our apologies to those who were stirred up by last month's Next month page. Should any of you feel seriously aggrieved we're sure LucasArts' publisher will be more than happy to offer you an explanation.

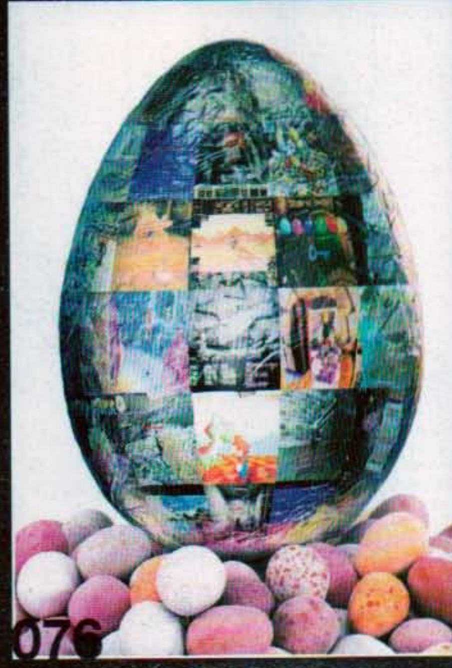
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054

Features







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The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET)

Tel: +44 1225 442244





Bath London Milan New York Paris San Francisco



Printed in the UK



ABC 30,118 (Audit Bureau of Circulation)

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Colour reproduction
Pre-Press, Bath Phoenix Repro, Bath

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Cradley Print, Warley, West Midlands

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directory april

The 'masters of the university' issue



















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Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe *Photoshop*, Macromedia *FreeHand*, and Microsoft *Office* **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica [illegible], Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**


"That's right, Mr Martini. There is an Easter Bunny."


ARE YOU READY?
XBOX
2.22
Microsoft

Xbox gets off to inauspicious start in Japan

Microsoft pays the price for a launch campaign dogged by mistakes and blunders, but Dead or Alive 3 sells in sufficient numbers to save face

With a reasonably successful US launch behind it, Microsoft faced the sternest test of its Xbox mettle yet on February 22, when Tokyo's Shibuya district, decked out in publicity posters, witnessed the Japanese launch of the console. Once again, Bill Gates was on hand to lend his personal endorsement, and the appropriately monikered J-Pop band, X-Japan, was enlisted in a bid to drum up a bit of launch day fervour among the queues that had assembled to observe the first major US console to launch in the country since the 3DO in 1993. But after the initial commotion had died down, preliminary sales figures indicated that, while not disastrous, Microsoft's performance wasn't particularly impressive.

Early reports suggested that the company managed to shift around 123,000 Xbox units, priced at ¥34,800 (£185) each, during its first week on sale – nearly half of the initial shipment of 250,000 consoles. Which, in absolute terms, is considerably less than the 300,000 GameCube units sold during the week of its launch last September. Indeed the Japanese launch of GameCube wasn't widely regarded as a success, and Microsoft doesn't have the imminent prospect of *Pikmin*, *Smash Brothers*, and a new set of vividly coloured consoles up its sleeve to give its console a sales boost in the short-term. Worryingly for Microsoft, second-hand Xbox units are reportedly already on sale at a discount in Akihabara as **Edge** goes to press.







Microsoft's Special Edition Xbox sold reasonably well, but the console's launch didn't go entirely smoothly, and complaints about faulty units scratching game discs soon appeared

Photography: Hiroki Izumi

[Microsoft] shifted around 123,000 units during its first week, which is considerably less than the 300,000 GameCube units sold during its launch

It would seem then, that a sceptical Japanese gaming audience still needs to be convinced by the power of Xbox; given the relatively low launch figures, it's particularly important that in the short- to medium-term, the console's software line-up is a strong one. Of the 12 software titles that were available at launch, the key sellers were Tecmo's *Dead or Alive 3*, Capcom's *Genma Onimusha*, and Microsoft's own *Project Gotham Racing*, but the software ratio wasn't particularly dazzling, with figures suggesting that approximately 1.5 games were sold for every console. Disappointingly, Smilebit's wonderful *Jet Set Radio Future* sold under 10,000 copies, though Microsoft's *Tenku* (*Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding*) and *Nezumi Kuzu* (*Nezmix*) fared even worse, with just 8,000 copies picked up by consumers.

What these figures demonstrate is the importance of the *Dead or Alive* franchise to the fortunes of Xbox; having sold 85,000 copies, the game proved to be a system seller. Without it, there's no question that a succession of mistakes made over the course of the long running build-up to launch would have marred the console's chances. Indeed mistakes continued to be made even after the launch. As complaints soon filtered in that the Xbox was scratching game discs and DVDs, Microsoft initially failed to endear itself to new customers by demanding sums of up to ¥8,000 for repairs to be conducted, for example. As **Edge** goes to press, reports are indicating that the problem is serious enough to warrant a recall, though Microsoft is adamant that the setback is a superficial one.

There was also confusion regarding the capabilities of the Special Edition Xbox. Though more expensive than the standard unit at ¥39,800 (£215), sales of this translucent model, replete with Bill Gates key fob and designed specifically for the







Taking its lead from several other high-profile gaming launches, Microsoft opted to festoon Tokyo's Shibuya district in Xbox logos. Arguably, it would have been better off in Akihabara



Japanese market, were reasonable enough, with 37,700 units sold out of 50,000. Once again though, complaints soon sprang up from punters who had wrongly believed this version to support HDTV playback and DVD compatibility out of the box.

Teething troubles

Of course, every new console has its teething troubles, and problems such as these are to be expected if not exactly embraced. But the real oversights and errors started back at the Tokyo Game Show in spring of last year, and have continued to cast a shadow over Xbox. Despite positive measures, such as introducing the unit at an affordable price compared to Europe, or organising the recent Xbox Experience event in Akihabara, Microsoft has simply found it impossible to shake off every bit of criticism within Japan.

Although it's easy in hindsight to point out mistakes, posing on a burger mat was the least of Bill Gates' slip-ups as it turns out. Perhaps the most significant came at the spring TGS, when he allegedly forgot to visit Konami. Having taken the time to visit the likes of Sega and Koei, he neglected to call upon Konami's waiting CEO – despite the fact that the company was the only publisher to demonstrate a playable title (*Airforce Delta 2*) at the show. And the mistakes continued right up to February 22. Microsoft's publicity campaign proved vague and ambiguous to the majority of Japanese gamers, for example, and poor titles such as *Nezmix* failed to win plaudits.

A series of publicity events in February appeared to have left things too late to generate any significant buzz about the Xbox. Prior to this the Japanese public hac little chance to witness the machine firsthand, and though events in Tokyo and Osaka went off without a hitch, their impac was marginal. Another possible mistake was the choice of release date. Following SCEI's successful lead, Microsoft chose a launch date according to memorable numerology. Unfortunately, February 22, which fell a couple of days before most Japanese companies pay employees their salaries, proved inauspicious.

Screen test

And then there was the decision to stage the Xbox launch in Shibuya – as opposed t the arguably more appropriate gaming district of Akihabara. Again following the lead of SCEI, which monopolised the area for the PS2 launch three years ago, as well as UGA and Konami, which launched *Space Channel 5* and *Metal Gear Solid 2* respectively, Microsoft bedecked the area with Xbox logos. There was even a luminous Xbox bus and Xbox girls giving out coffee. But having decided to use the three giant screens over the Hachiko crossing to publicise the Xbox launch even Microsoft Japan proved incapable of actinc speedily. One week prior to launch, the company had still failed to act, and with only one screen available, last-minute negotiation was required with companies renting the other two screens.

If Japanese gamers were left with the impression that Microsoft is incapable of







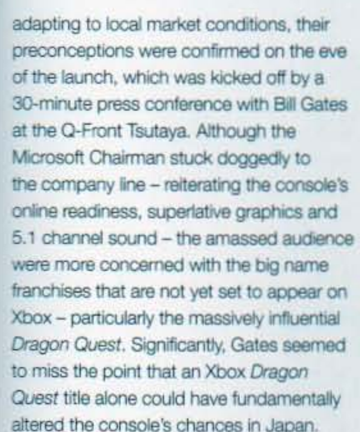


Clockwise from top left: The sales of *Dead or Alive 3* seem to have had a significant outcome on the launch of Xbox, with titles like *Genma Onimusha*, *Project Gotham Racing*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Silent Hill 2* also performing reasonably. *Nezmix*, though, didn't go down well





Luminous lorries provided Shibuya with a constant reminder of the Xbox launch



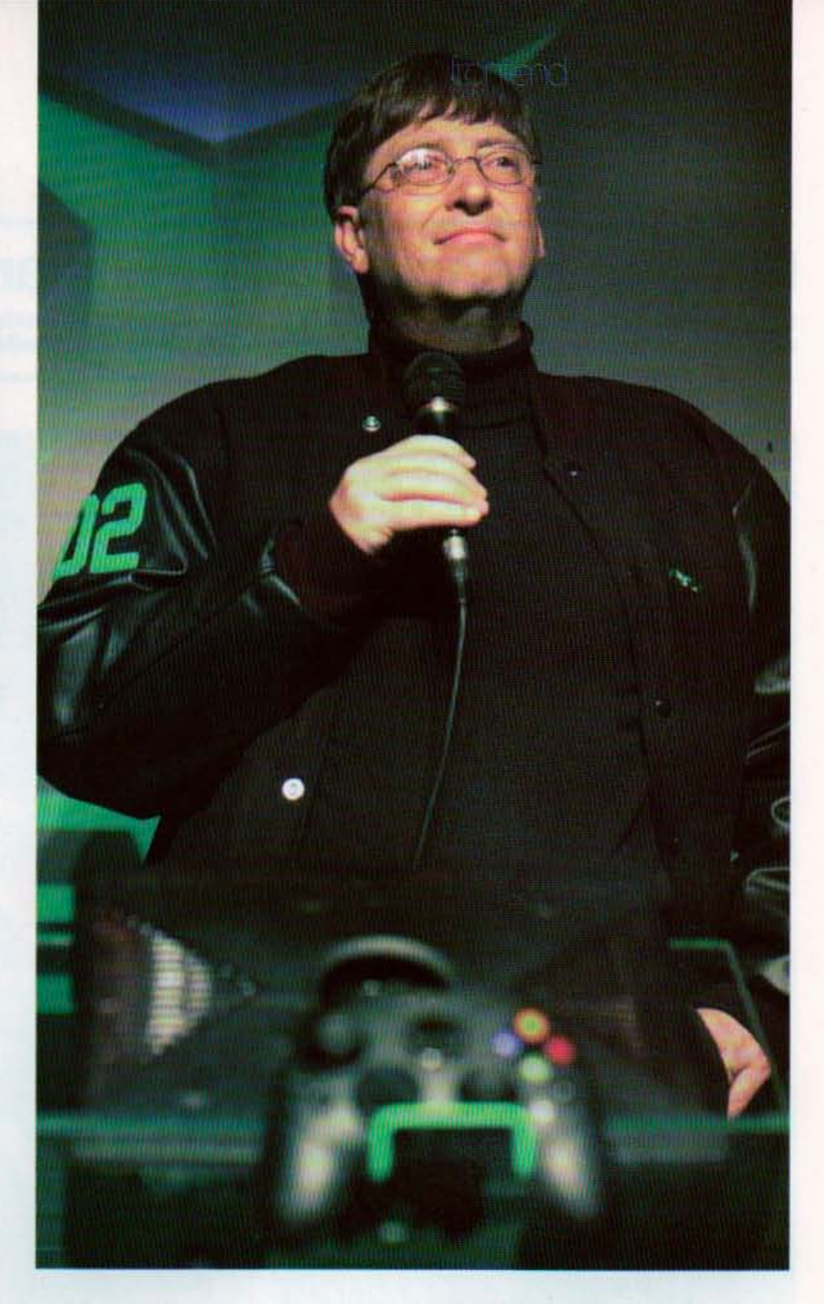
adapting to local market conditions, their preconceptions were confirmed on the eve of the launch, which was kicked off by a 30-minute press conference with Bill Gates at the Q-Front Tsutaya. Although the Microsoft Chairman stuck doggedly to the company line – reiterating the console's online readiness, superlative graphics and 5.1 channel sound – the amassed audience were more concerned with the big name franchises that are not yet set to appear on Xbox – particularly the massively influential *Dragon Quest*. Significantly, Gates seemed to miss the point that an Xbox *Dragon Quest* title alone could have fundamentally altered the console's chances in Japan.

By the end of the conference the Japanese press were left with a number of important questions: why release *Genma Onimusha* one week before the sequel arrives on PlayStation2? Why release *Nezmix* rather than *Halo*? Why launch in Shibuya rather than Akihabara? Why was there no baseball title available at launch?

After such a number of errors, it was almost predictable that the launch itself didn't pass without a hitch. For a start, discount store Bic Camera jumped the start time of the official launch event by half an hour. Then there was the fact that a sizeable contingent of X-Japan fans turned up without any intention of buying an Xbox. After the band had finished, confusion continued to reign as a select band of customers and journalists were ushered in to the Q-Front store to take part in some stage managed promotion events – leaving a number of disgruntled punters outside, and prompting one major newspaper reporter to give up and boycott the event. Perhaps the final straw came when perceptive customers realised that a significant portion of the early crowd was made up of Microsoft employees, with several high profile members of Microsoft Japan making a swift exit after purchasing a console in a remarkable display of devotion.

Given such a performance, the importance of the *Dead or Alive* franchise can't be underestimated. Nobody expected Microsoft to have an easy ride introducing Xbox into Japan, but having made a rod for its own back, Tecmo's beat 'em up emerged as the console's saviour. Indeed Microsoft needs to take note that things could have been much worse because the short-term future of the console is far from assured in Japan. Nevertheless, the company has made a success of its plans in the US, and by the time this issue of **Edge** reaches you, the UK launch is expected to have gone relatively smoothly, with titles such as *Halo* and *Amped* more attractive to western gamers. The million dollar question is whether the Xbox can survive on the basis of success in only two of the three major territories, and indeed whether it will have to. Particularly in the face of competition from GameCube and the increasingly attractive PS2.

The million dollar question is whether the Xbox can survive on the basis of success in only two of the three major territories







Once again, Bill Gates was on hand to look on proudly and lend his personal endorsement. Nevertheless, the Japanese gaming public still seem resistant to the charms of the Xbox

Miyamoto shows off new Mario footage in London

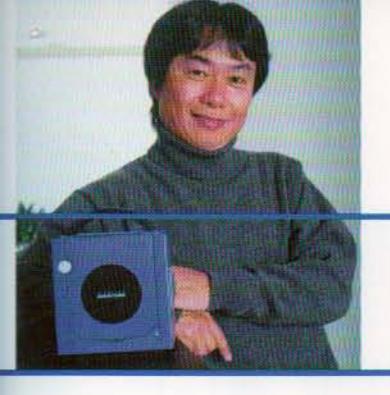
Nintendo figurehead tours Europe to kick off the GameCube pre-launch hype, as a 'Cube Club' tour is announced and the marketing campaign unveiled

Nintendo has started to reveal some tantalising details about *Mario Sunshine*. The pack on Mario's back is a water jet, which seems to be used both as a weapon and to provide propulsion, but its main use seems to be to clear up graffiti





Now that the European GameCube launch has been pinned down to May 3, Nintendo Europe has finally started its publicity machine rolling. Prior to unveiling a pan-European marketing strategy, and announcing a string of Cube Club publicity events across the continent and in the UK, the company's legendary game designer, **Shigeru Miyamoto** toured Europe to evangelise Nintendo's unique brand of gaming hardware, reaching London on February 21.



Nintendo's charming figurehead gave out *Pikmin* souvenirs at the end of his visit





Judging from the video footage that Miyamoto-san was showing off, Mario seems to be more acrobatic than his predecessors, traversing tightropes and climbing trees with ease

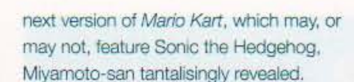
The company has revealed that the European launch will be accompanied by a sophisticated marketing campaign, featuring the tag line 'Life's a game' and 3,500 units will be distributed to retailers for demonstration in-store. Between April 2–27, there will also be five Cube Club events, featuring attractions such as *WaveRace* rider and the Photo-Cube. However, with these events not open to the public, and restricted to over-18s, their marketing effectiveness would appear to be slim.

"By 2005 only around 20 per cent of European households will have access to broadband. Nintendo cannot afford to program for only 20 per cent of households"

More useful was the decision to bring the charming Miyamoto-san over to London to espouse his own perception of Nintendo's unique approach to gaming. Indeed after unveiling new footage of *Mario Sunshine*, *Metroid Prime*, *StarFox Adventures* and *Eternal Darkness*, he was keen to reiterate the details of the console's European launch. "We were going to launch the GameCube in March in Europe," he explained, "but this would have put us in a disadvantageous position. The only reason we delayed the launch was that we wanted to prepare the right amount of hardware, and by delaying the launch to May we are now trying to store enough inventory. On day one we are trying to ship 500,000 units across Europe. Within two months we expect to ship a million units."

The previously unseen footage gave a clearer indication of what can be expected from the second wave of Nintendo software, such as the HUD display of *Metroid Prime* and a new control dynamic for *Mario*. Although it appeared similar to *Super Mario 64*, *Mario Sunshine* features a water jet, which Mario appears to be able to use as both a weapon and a means of propulsion. The premise of the game is that someone has been impersonating Mario, leaving a trail of vandalism. Players have to conduct a cleanup operation while finding out the identity of the nefarious villain.

Regrettably, no new footage of the next *Zelda* title was shown because, according to Miyamoto-san, people have been too quick to judge the game on appearance alone. However, this does mean that a playable version of the game is intended to be ready for E3 – possibly along with the



next version of *Mario Kart*, which may, or may not, feature Sonic the Hedgehog, Miyamoto-san tantalisingly revealed.

He also proved keen to shake off the perception that the GameCube is merely aimed at kids. "Whenever we are having talks with licensees, we make a point in asking them, 'Please, you must make something suited for Nintendo'. When we are saying we want to have something unique for Nintendo, they obviously mistake it and think Nintendo wants some childish-looking games. But when I'm talking about what's unique about Nintendo, it's not childish software but rather things like the connectivity with Game Boy Advance. I myself designed this hardware with a wish that it is going to be played by all family members, from small children to older people. And we really want GameCube to become the platform where unique games are going to be introduced."

Indeed it's this inclusive stance that has shaped the company's attitude towards online connectivity. "We guess that by 2005 only around 20 per cent of European households will have access to broadband. Nintendo cannot afford to program for only 20 per cent of households when we have the possibility to sell to 100 per cent of them with non-networked games."

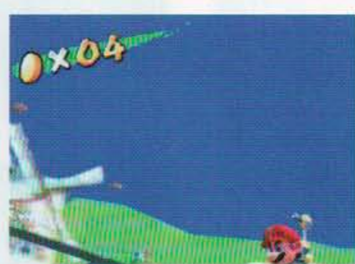
It's also a disposition that has shaped the company's decision to use a proprietary disc format. Describing the current financial difficulties of several major Japanese developers, he lamented the drive towards realism: "I'm not sure if it's the whole world demanding realistic graphics or just a limited number of games players, but some developers feel threatened into making realistic games right now. In the end they cannot recoup their investment in the game." But with Nintendo's smaller disc size, it's not feasible to produce the sort of realistic graphics that characterise the output of development houses such as Square. "So, in a way the smaller disc is a message from Nintendo that you don't need to fill out the capacity of a normal sized DVD disc."

Finally, Miyamoto-san stressed the importance of Europe to Nintendo, and, as if in confirmation, generously handed out *Pikmin* souvenirs. With Nintendo's talismanic president, Hiroshi Yamauchi stepping down later this year, it even seems like he's leaving the company in good hands.





Miyamoto-san also demonstrated new footage of Rare's *StarFox Adventures* and *Eternal Darkness* by Silicon Knights









Although expectations for *Metroid Prime* remain high, it's impossible to judge how successful Retro Studios will be in updating the 8bit original. Transitions from firstperson to thirdperson seem smooth though, and the HUD-like display appears to be adequately atmospheric

Culture Shock

Videogames get the red carpet treatment as the Barbican goes 'Game On'



Game on indeed. For the first time ever UK residents are about to have the opportunity to sample, not just a slice, but a comprehensive overview of videogaming through the ages. Four years in the making, the 'Game On' exhibition at the Barbican gallery, London – which runs from May 16 to September 15, 2002 – boasts the world's finest collection of videogame machines and memorabilia. But the exhibition's organisers are keen to emphasise that the show is not just a stuffy history lesson but is to be a celebration of gaming including cultural analysis, a glimpse at the future of gaming and over 130 working machines to give attendees a hands-on experience during their day out.

"We have included a large number of playable games in the show, some well known, others less well known, but all significant," enthuses 'Game On' curator **Conrad Bodman**. "There will be much here for fans and we have involved a number of experts who have been working in the games industry for many years to help us make sure that the information we are providing is comprehensive." Companies as diverse as Game Freak, Core Design, Sony, Square, DMA Design and Nintendo have all been eager to provide exclusive information to such a worthy project.

Apart from minor exhibitions and retro meets, the UK has failed to produce a show anywhere near the scale of 'Game On' – a sure sign that videogames are beginning to be accepted as culturally relevant. Only 'Videotopia', a travelling exhibition in the US has come this close. The most impressive aspect of the show is the length the curators have gone to to locate some of videogaming's finest treasures. A combination of intense research, good international industry links and contacting obsessive retro collectors has resulted in a bountiful haul.

Apart from minor exhibitions, the UK has failed to produce a show anywhere near the scale of 'Game On' – a sure sign that videogames are beginning to be accepted as culturally relevant

Alongside original working coin-ops including, *Defender*, *Centipede* and *Asteroids* will be a PDP-1 – the machine which hosted Steve Russell's 1962 *Space War* – and a *Computer Space* cabinet from 1971. Among the collectors who have kindly loaned machines to the gallery is *Drop Zone* creator and industry veteran **Archer Maclean**. "I think my [*Computer Space*] is the only one in Europe," says Maclean. The fact that it's 30-years-old and



Among the more ancient exhibits is the PDP-1, the MIT computer which hosted Steve Russell's *Space War*

Some enduring favourites will be at the show to give youngsters a taste of gaming before the polygon shock. (From left to right), *Donkey Kong*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Pong* and *Computer Space*. Over 130 playable games will be spread across two floors of the Barbican













Shelton Fleming are designing the set for the 'Game On' exhibition. The final look will take inspiration from global game cultures and will be a little less retro than the image above

still works is extremely unusual. Most machines that are even 20-years-old don't work because they've had a hard life and the various chips and components just literally crumble back into sand when you try repair things."

The show will take up two full floors of the Barbican gallery and cover 15,000 square metres. Issues as varied as localisation, gaming's influence on the military, the history of handheld gaming and the use of mods and engines in architecture will be tackled in a number of themed areas. Those looking to relax away from the general hubbub may find refuge in some of the more esoteric areas. Rooms dedicated to cultural diversity (including a room devoted to Japanese gaming), sports titles, music, characters and visuals will offset the gaming pleasures which are available.



Organisers expect the show to draw in huge crowds due to the high interactivity

Democratic show

"It is important that the show doesn't behave like most gallery shows – a few security guards and a general atmosphere of hushed contemplation," says exhibition organiser **Lucien King**. "Games are to be played and talked about and beaten – so I think there will be a lot of talking during this show. We will also have four young people present who know about games and the culture. They can help or inform people of aspects they may be interested in. The show is kind of democratic compared to many – it's designed with the sharing of ideas and abilities in mind – the public are as much part of the history and culture of videogames as the materials in the show itself."

A 'Game On' book containing essays from J.C. Herz, Mark Pesche and Steven Poole will also accompany the show priced at £20. Ultimately, the exhibition is set to both inform and illuminate a subject which is often misrepresented or dumbed-down in the mainstream media. **Edge** certainly looks forward to the critical response the exhibition will provoke.





Dance and rhythm action titles, such as *PaRappa the Rapper* (top) will be on show, while *Star Wars Galaxies* (above) will give a glimpse at future online games

Hands on gaming

Just 13 of the arcade games attendees will be able to play during their day out at the forthcoming 'Game On' exhibition:

Computer Space
Pong
Space Invaders
Defender
Missile Command
Asteroids
Battlezone
Tempest
Star Wars
Tron
Centipede
Pac-Man and *Ms Pac-Man*
Donkey Kong



CUTTINGS



Movie news

As *Metal Gear Solid 2* gives the mainstream press reason to declare the increasing convergence of movies and games, the real business of recycling old ideas for cross-medium exploitation continues unabated. As the 'Hollywood Reporter' reveals that a sequel to the *Resident Evil* movie is already in the works, and interest is growing in a silver screen adaptation of *Halo*, news also emerges that a number of other high profile franchises may be making the leap to celluloid. First, there's a live action version of *Tekken*, which is to be filmed in April next year for a 2005 release; then there's a project based on Sega's *The House of the Dead*; and finally, New Line Cinema, brimming with confidence after the success of the 'Lord of the Rings' movie, will be responsible for the unlikely adaptation of Rockstar's *State of Emergency*.

BTopenworld launches games site

Following successful trials in December and January, BTopenworld has launched its online games subscription service on the Games Domain Website. To celebrate the launch of the service, which costs £9.99 per calendar month, Games Domain will also be launching the first UK Online Games Championship, giving gamers the chance to compete in three categories: football, firstperson shooters (*Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and *Counter-Strike*), and casual games (Games Domain's speed chess). Online heats will run from April to May with the LAN based final taking place in June 2002 in London, for a total prize of over £20,000. To take part, you will need to register on the Games Domain Website before the end of April.

The company will also be sponsoring the UK's biggest LAN event, I10, which takes place from March 29 until April 1, 2002 at Newbury race course. Entry costs £70 for four days. For more information, visit http://www.gamesdomain.co.uk/

Remains of the Day

A new Manchester-based startup company, Looferscoft, has announced news of its deal with Faber and Faber to develop games based on some of the publisher's most famous novels. Details of the company's first title, 'Remains of the Day', are scant, but **Edge** has heard that it involves a *Sims*-style perspective in which the player must win the affections of a housekeeper through 'the art of waiting and genteel behaviour'. The game is slated for a Q4 release.

Big Three unite to bring Triforce technology to arcades

News that Nintendo, Sega and Namco are to produce a new coin-op platform dominated an otherwise lacklustre AOU exhibition at Tokyo's Makuhari Messe

The year's first major arcade exhibition on Japanese soil did little to dispel the appearance of a sector undergoing a prolonged period of continued decline. Taking place on February 22 – the same day that Xbox was launched in the Shibuya district – AOU 2002 required just a single hall of Tokyo's Makuhari Messe exhibition centre, and of that only about a third was given over to videogame coin-ops. Given the muted reception that greeted the launch of Microsoft's console, the subdued tone could hardly be ascribed to competition from Redmond. It's more likely to reflect the increasing difficulties that face publishers trying to eke out a profit from a sector that has suffered from successive years of competition with mobile phones and sophisticated home consoles.





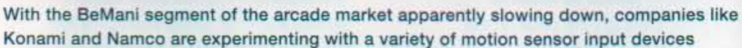
Arcade platform

The major highlight of the show was the announcement that Nintendo, Sega and Namco have joined forces to develop a low-cost arcade platform based on GameCube architecture, appropriately enough taking its name, Triforce, from the *Zelda* universe. Essentially consisting of customised GameCube hardware with added memory and a GD-Rom drive, the system has been designed by Sega, but will have advantages for all three companies. For a start, the technology is cheap to develop for and produce. For Nintendo, this obviously raises the prospect of a means to generate content for the GameCube itself, in the way of converted arcade titles, as well as a means to raise the profile of its consumer console. For Namco and Sega, the obvious advantages are ease of portability to GameCube and inexpensive development, smoothing the process of multiformat production.

It does raise questions over the strategy of the two companies regarding their own hardware – Sega's Naomi and Namco's System 246. At the moment it looks like all three platforms will coexist – though for how long is anyone's guess, particularly given the expense of developing on System 246. Unfortunately the first titles to appear on Triforce hardware weren't ready to put in an appearance at AOU, but it is expected that several will be displayed at JAMMA 2002.

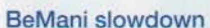
Aside from the Triforce announcement, there was little to see, and the number of videogame publishers exhibiting seemed smaller than in previous years. Although big names such as Sega, Namco, Konami and Taito were all in attendance, many smaller companies opted out, and the rest of the show was given over to companies dealing with cabinet parts. Once again, Sega was the dominant force, despite showing off few new titles. Sega Rosso's *Soul Surfer* and Hitmaker's *The Maze of the Kings* joined existing titles such as the highly successful *Derby Owners Club* and AM2's sole contribution, *King of Route 66*, while Wow Entertainment displayed a typing version of its *Lupin the Third* lightgun title.





With the BeMani segment of the arcade market apparently slowing down, companies like Konami and Namco are experimenting with a variety of motion sensor input devices

Meanwhile, Namco featured a long awaited playable, if incomplete, version of *Soul Calibur 2*. Surprisingly, little effort seemed to have been taken promoting the title, though this probably reflected the limited resources of the company's arcade division; the game was simply shown running on standard oneplayer cabinets. Although the game's spring release is still some way off, it's already looking like the standout title that consumers are expecting. Gameplay is similar to that of the Dreamcast version of *Soul Calibur*, with combos reworked to offer a greater visual spectacle, but the real distinguishing feature is the heightened sophistication of the game's eight-way run capability – offering a decisive shift away from the game's precursor. Technically, it's an impressive demonstration of the abilities of the company's System 246 board, though at this stage the character models seem to be lacking something.



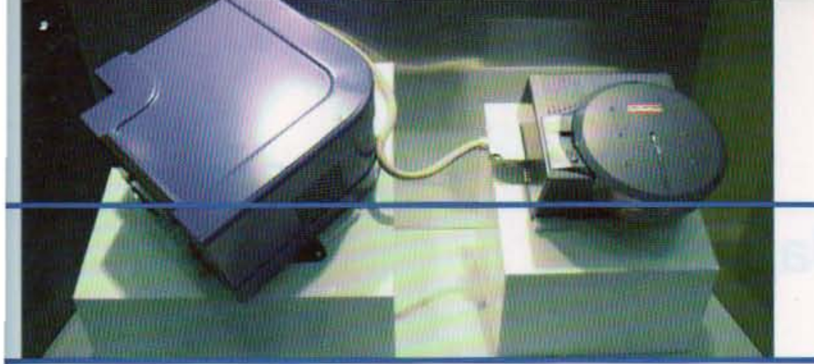
BeMani slowdown

Of the other titles at Namco's stand, only one or two stood out. *Mazan*, for example, which, though it leaves something to be desired, did seem like a more effective implementation of the technology than Konami's similar motion sensor samurai title *Tsurugi*. And *Alien Sniper*, a lightgun game, enlivened by a special targeting mode to distinguish alien targets from humans. Konami, meanwhile, had little to offer, though its stand did provide further evidence that the soaraway success of the BeMani genre is beginning to slow.





Despite similarities to previous titles in the series, Sammy's *Guilty Gear XX* (left) proved one of the show's more popular titles; Namco's *Alien Sniper* (right) less so



Although the Triforce hardware was unveiled (left), it won't be until JAMMA 2002 that software for it is revealed









Though it was far from complete, *Soul Calibur 2* was dazzling in its finery

Instead, the company seems to be turning its attention towards motion sensor titles. Likewise, Taito's single title was a motion sensor table tennis game, though this didn't boast very sophisticated graphics or gameplay to support the technology. Finally, *Metal Slug 4* and *Guilty Gear XX*, neither of which represented a huge advance on previous chapters of their respective franchises, proved popular.

Overall then, AOU was disappointing. There is some hope that the forthcoming JAMMA show will offer a greater variety of titles, with perhaps the first look at software developed on the new Triforce board and the first glimpse of coin-op hardware configured around Xbox architecture. But given the prolonged downswing of the arcade sector, it's unlikely to show signs of any sort of quick recovery – posing difficult questions of companies that are still committed to the sector.







One of the most popular titles on the show floor, *Metal Slug 4* is arguably an indication that the arcade sector is running out of new ideas, in spite of Edge's admiration for the title

CUTTINGS



THQ signs distribution deal with Koei
THQ has signed an exclusive distribution deal with Japanese publisher Koei, to distribute four of the company's PlayStation2 titles in Europe. The deal covers *G1 Jockey*, *Gitaroo Man* (reviewed in **E**101), *Kessen II* and *Dynasty Warriors 3* (reviewed in **E**106, shown above), which has sold over 750,000 copies in its native Japan. Koei will translate each title into English, German and French.

Bam! Entertainment extends portfolio
Bath-based publisher Bam! Entertainment has announced that it has signed *Chase*, a vehicle-based stunt game based on a premise that's remarkably similar to that of Infogrames' *Stuntman*. Due to be released in the summer, the title is being developed for Xbox by South African studio I-Imagine, with support from Microsoft's Incubator Program. Bam! has also announced that it will be publishing *Reign of Fire* for PlayStation2, developed by Kuju Entertainment and based on the forthcoming Spyglass movie of the same name.

Invaders spotted on Sky
BskyB and Taito have reached an agreement to make arcade classic *Space Invaders* available over Sky digital's Gamestar service, the TV games section of the Sky Active service. Although Tomohiro Nishikado's 1978 masterpiece will be played using the BskyB remote control, Taito's **Masaaki Ohzuno** seems pleased with the conversion, stating that, "The quality of the game is as close to the coin-op original as one could hope." The game joins 23 other titles available over the service, from developers such as Rage, Empire and Team 17.

Babel provides outsourced solutions
Localisation specialist Babel Media has been extending the range of outsourced solutions that it offers to the games industry. Having adapted *Worms* for Sky's interactive TV platform, and launched the world's first handheld compatibility lab, the company has recently been appointed as the main content provider for Nintendo Europe's Game Boy Advance Website (www.gameboyadvance.com), providing news and reviews in four European languages.

PlayStation2 goes online in Japan

Sony steals a march on Xbox as broadband strategy unveiled in Japan





The forthcoming roster of network ready PlayStation2 games includes (from top) *Biohazard Online* from Capcom, and *Nobunaga's Ambition Online* from Koei

SCEI has revealed that its long awaited broadband strategy for PlayStation2 will kick off in Japan from April. The service, which will be known as PlayStation BB, will allow owners of the console to download music and videos, as well as PlayStation2 software. Crucially, the move pre-empts Microsoft's online strategy, despite Redmond's continued assertions that Xbox is online ready out of the box. Ironically, the unabashed transformation of Sony's game console into a multifunctional networked device arrives as Microsoft is repeatedly denying rumours that it is developing a Homestation device to transform Xbox into a home hub device.

The announcement is the culmination of a series of strategic partnerships that SCEI has developed over recent months. Having signed agreements with all of Japan's major Internet service providers, the company's intent is to turn the PlayStation2 console into a home terminal. Several partner companies will take responsibility for the server hosting and online billing technology for the new service, and Sony's proprietary authentication system, DNAS (Dynamic Network Authentication System) will ensure a secure online environment. The company's Broadband Navigator browser will support games, music and videos, as well as standard Web browsing.

NTT Broadband will be offering the services for a monthly fee of ¥1,500 (£8) or a prepaid package that costs ¥18,000 (£100) for 18 months of service. It is believed that these prices will include the rental of the PlayStation2 broadband adapter, and the service will also require users to own the PS2 HDD add-on. Although the service will eventually support personal video recorder (PVR) type functionality, when it launches it will support several functions. Email and messaging will be possible, while the PlayStation Jukebox service will allow music downloads and streaming video is to be supported via RealPlayer. The most significant function though, is the download of PlayStation2 software – which has the potential to radically transform the current PS2 software distribution revenue model.





Sony's home hub strategy contrasts with the stated aims of both Nintendo and Microsoft, and it's unclear as to how it will affect the solid state accessibility expected of consoles

Networked titles

To coincide with the announcement, Sony revealed nearly 30 titles that will be playable online. The first networked title available for the platform will be Square's *Final Fantasy XI*, which is released in Japan on May 16. Having been playtested over Square's PlayOnline service since December, the game will sell for ¥7,800 (£40), with an additional monthly charge of ¥1,280 (£7). Other online titles in development include Capcom's *Auto Modellista* and *Biohazard Online*; an unnamed MMORPG from Atlus; From Software's *Armored Core Sigma*; *Shutokou Battle Online* from Genki; Hudson's *Bomberman Online*; Koei's latest strategy title, *Nobunaga's Ambition Online*; Sega's *Hundred Swords* and *Guru Guru Onsen*; several unnamed titles from Konami and Namco; Sony's own *Everybody's Golf Online*; and a massively multiplayer action title from Tecmo.



In addition to titles like *Final Fantasy XI*, the PlayStation BB service will aso facilitate music downloads and streaming video over RealNetworks' RealPlayer

Though there is no launch date yet for the rollout of PlayStation2 online services in Europe, Sony is expected to make its plans known at E3 in May, and trials are underway with Telewest and BTopenworld in the UK. As **Edge** goes to press, SCEA has just announced that online services will be available for PlayStation2 from August in the US, requiring the network adapter add-on, which will retail for $40 (£28).

Electronic Arts court academic community

Leading publisher enters into agreement with the Kent Institute of Art and Design to prepare future generations of coders

Electronic Arts has announced that it is to enter into an agreement with the Kent Institute of Art and Design (KIAD), which will see the publisher of titles such as *SSX Tricky* and *Medal of Honor* provide the university with equipment that will be used by future generations of development talent. The agreement is the result of an ongoing relationship between the two entities, and the first course to benefit will be the Digital 3D Design BA (Hons), which prepares students for a range of careers in the games industry.

KIAD, which boasts distinguished alumni such as Turner Prize nominee Tracy Emin, has worked with Electronic Arts on previous occasions, as **Clive Arundell**, the leader of the new course points out. "Working on projects like *SimCity* and *Matt Hayes Fishing* has been a fantastic experience for us and for the School of Design. It gives our students a really valuable insight into what games design is all about. This kind of experience is exactly what we need to help make the new course relevant to the industry."

But the deal should be just as beneficial to Electronic Arts, and the UK games industry in general. "EA wants to encourage the emergence of new talent and a vibrant pool of specialists," explains the company's UK managing director, **Paul Jackson**. "It is crucial that we maintain a vibrant UK development culture. We may lose out significantly if we are not careful."

Indeed, it's a positive step given that the videogame industry and academic community frequently fail to see eye to eye. "There are certainly some interesting courses around," Jackson continues, "but the problem is that most of these are games design courses, and this industry needs individuals with a broader skill set – an ability to think outside of traditional boundaries. It's a bit like the film industry running a 'Steven Spielberg course'; it pigeon-holes students. What we need is top talent in technology and art. Our Spielbergs will emerge from that."

Significantly, it's also fairly indicative of a gradual shift in attitude towards the games industry on the part of the academic community, which has become more receptive towards videogames over the last couple of years, as Jackson confirms. "We talked to some universities a few years ago and there was absolutely no interest at all. KIAD from day one were incredibly flexible and were genuinely interested in addressing the needs of the industry. However it would be wrong for us to be too critical, as several universities have been doing good work.



Paul Jackson, managing director of Electronic Arts' UK division

Our view is that if we want to change things, then we need to be proactive. This agreement has offered us the opportunity to do that. Hopefully over time universities will sit up and take notice."

More information about courses that are relevant to the games industry will be published in **Edge**'s forthcoming 'Playing the Game 2002' supplement.

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Jet Set Radio Future	Xbox	Infogrames	Smilebit	8
Phantasy Star Online Ver.2	DC	Sega	Sonic Team	8
Ico (PAL)	PS2	SCEE	SCEI	8
Virtua Fighter 4	PS2	Sega	Sega-AM2	7
Golden Sun	GBA	Nintendo	Camelot	7
Herdy Gerdy	PS2	Eidos Interactive	Core Design	6
Invader	GBA	Xicat Interactive	Formula/Lost Boys Games	6
Drakan: The Ancients' Gates	PS2	SCEE	Surreal Software	6
Command & Conquer: Renegade	PC	Electronic Arts	In-house (Westwood)	5
Star Wars Obi-Wan	Xbox	Activision	LucasArts	3
Guilty Gear X Advance Edition	GBA	Sammy	Arc System Works	3



Sega's *Jet Set Radio Future*: return of the rail-way children



PSO Ver.2 with Dreamkey v3.0, enabling flat-rate access for many



Enjoy the fairytale landscapes with Yorda in SCEI's bewitching *Ico*



There's no dodging the fact that *VF4* is a tad short of triple-A status

CUTTINGS



PlayStation in the park

Providing gamers the excuse to get out and enjoy the fresh air, '2C: The Official PlayStation Event' will take place from May 4–6 in West London's Gunnersbury Park. As well as providing the opportunity to sample the event's games challenge arena, which will showcase current and classic PlayStation titles, the event will also combine music, film and urban sports. While the park itself boasts a capacity of 35,000, a free sports arena featuring a rolling programme of skateboarding, BMX and dirt bike demos will house approximately 5,000 spectators.

Elsewhere, an open-air stage and mix arena will provide a cutting edge soundtrack, and a big-screen cinema will be showing a selection of films and documentaries. Tickets for the event cost £18 per day, and are available by calling 0115 934 6757, or visiting the event's Website at http://www.2ctheofficialplatstationevent.com/

Manchester hosts academic videogame conference

In a bid to bring academics and gaming professionals together in a greater understanding of videogames, the University of Manchester is holding a conference called 'Playing with the Future: Development and Directions in Computer Gaming' from April 5–7. The conference features a wide range of topics ranging from the educational potential of computer gaming to the computer games and violence debate and from investigations of games markets to developing cheat-proofing protocols. Speakers will include ELSPA's Mike Rawlinson and the IGDA's Jason Della Rocca. More information can be found at http://www.cric.ac.uk/cric/gamerz/

ECTS goes public

Following criticism of last year's show, event organisers have revealed that this year's ECTS exhibition, which will take place from September 1–3 at London's ExCel, will be open to the public for the first time in its 14-year history. In a major revamp of the existing structure, trade-only areas will be maintained alongside areas that are open to the public. Both the ECTS Awards and the Developers Area are set to return, alongside several new features, including the VIP Retail Lounge, four National Pavilions to provide a place for visitors from France, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia to meet, and a series of Keynote Seminars. For more information, visit http://www.ects.com/

www.transgaming.com

Penguins at play

TransGaming Technologies' goal is to play Windows PC games out of the box on the Linux operating system

Making Linux pay

One of the big problems of the open source software industry is how to make money if software is free. TransGaming's take on the issue is a smart one. While it releases its source code for WineX under the commercially restrictive Aladdin Free Public Licence, it won't release it under a more open licence until it has reached a certain number of monthly subscriptions. Subscription costs $5 a month and as well as allowing access to more code and support for problems, it allows users to vote on what games should be supported next. The medium-term goal of the company is reaching a subscriber base of 20,000 by 2003. Then it will release the WineX project back into the overall Wine open source program, where it will be freely available for any purpose. "We have extremely active discussion and voting areas with thousands of users participating in the community overall," says Gavriel State. "The growth of our subscriber base has been outstanding and we are truly pleased with the degree of support we have received."

Characterised by Linus Torvalds' Penguin logo, the Linux operating system is well established within the business server market. It's not been successful on the desktop however. One of the reasons, according to **Gavriel State**, CEO and founder of Canadian-based TransGaming Technologies, is a lack of gaming. It's not an original thought but it is a difficult one to do anything about. Companies such as Loki have attempted to port Windows games to Linux unsuccessfully. Publishers are nervous of the implications of the open source philosophy, and there just isn't a big enough market yet, as Loki found out when it sunk last year. TransGaming takes a different approach.

Using open source technology from the ongoing Wine project, TransGaming's WineX consists of an alternative implementation of the gaming components within Windows' core Win32 API, layered on top of a Linux kernel. This, in theory, should allow Linux users to install and run standard Windows PC games out the box. "It is very important to recognise that we are not, in fact, reverse engineering any of Microsoft's code," explains State. "We are forward engineering from published specifications and from analysis of what the actual game code is doing. We do not disassemble any of Microsoft's DirectX code. It is for this reason Microsoft's lawyers probably have not visited us."





Windows games but not as Microsoft knows them – as can be seen from the background. *Max Payne* (right) is the first DirectX 8 game

The support process is a complex one, though. While many older Windows games now work under WineX, TransGaming has to work on each new game it tries to run within WineX. "In addition to DirectX-related APIs that are simply not yet supported by WineX, almost any Win32 API implemented in WineX that is used by a game in an unusual way can cause us problems," State claims. It doesn't say much for stability of DirectX, that TransGaming has even discovered that some games appear to rely on bugs to work. "Some games make calls to APIs that should fail according to the documentation," he reveals, with a grin.

Hardware support

Ongoing work on WineX is focused on supporting the vertex and pixel shaders of DirectX 8. "Vertex shaders will take a bit longer because we need to implement them in software for graphics cards that don't support them in hardware," says State. "Pixel shaders are an optional feature of DirectX 8, so we will only be supporting those on compliant hardware."

The first DirectX 8 game to be supported is *Max Payne*. "We first spoke with Remedy Entertainment [developer of *Max Payne*] in late 2000. It is happy about our success with *Max Payne* since it benefits all parties to have such a popular game available on multiple platforms. We're now exploring a closer relationship," State confirms. Of course, the most ironic titles on the list include Microsoft-published examples such as *Age of Empires*.

Another recent big announcement has been the release of a $70 Linux Gaming Pack. In conjunction with Mandrake, which ships one of the most accessible desktop versions of Linux, and EA, the pack consists of the Mandrake Linux 8.1 operating system, a version of *The Sims*, which offers Linux-only features, and a three-month subscription to TransGaming's support services Website.

"The projected growth rate of the Linux desktop is 28 per cent over the next three years, while analysts IDC project Linux will comprise 20 per cent of the desktop market by 2004," ends an enthusiastic State. While Bill Gates looks the other way, Linux's penguins seem to be having a fine time.



TransGaming Technologies' WineX project gives gamers the opportunity to play titles such as *The Sims* and *Max Payne* within the Linux environment

Next step for RenderWare

www.renderware.com
www.csl.com

Collaboration and visualisation are the key words for Criterion's RenderWare Studio development framework

Few developers would have the gall to argue middleware hasn't become an important part of game development over the past couple of years. For Guildford-based middleware vendor Criterion Software however, only half the battle is won. Yes, its RenderWare Platform suite of tools is being used in studios such as Konami, Sony Online and NeverSoft, but games are fundamentally still made in the same way. Enter its secret weapon for world domination: RenderWare Studio.

The latest addition to the RenderWare range is an elusive concept to describe. It's been called "a tool that lets you make new tools" and "the ultimate toolchain." "The problem with trying to describe RenderWare Studio is that it's unlike anything else out there," reveals **Greg Whitfield**, Studio's development manager. "It's difficult to pigeonhole. It's not an API, not an engine, nor a level editor." What it is, Whitfield says, is a suite of tools that integrates together to allow the different types of people in a development team to work in a collaborative way.

Loaded with 'wares

The first external development team to use RenderWare Studio is the ex-Hostile Waters team at Rage. Lead by Julian Widdows, it is now working on an licensed but as-yet-unnamed game in conjunction with former SAS soldier Andy McNab. It's certainly well stocked up on middleware. As well as RenderWare, it's recently announced that it will also be using MathEngine's Karma physics solution, which incidentally is now being sold exclusively by Criterion as an integrated package within RenderWare Platform.

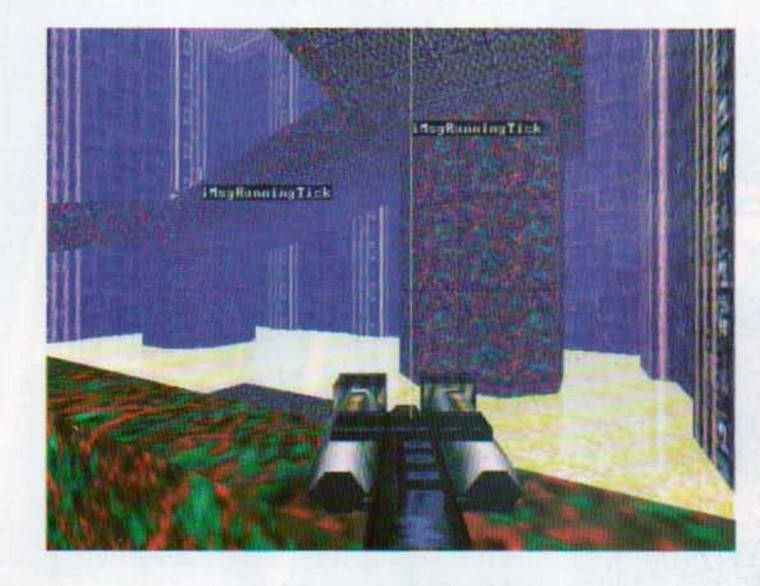
Realtime server

Developed out of an industrial and military visualisation tool for CAD systems, the key to the system is its realtime server, labelled Studio Manager. This ensures users can access all the assets of the game development process in a distributed and controlled manner. In doing so, it's helped by a link into alienbrain 5, the backend data management system from NxN that ships as an integral part of the overall RenderWare Studio package. Studio Manager is also linked to the game's code base. Team members access the system via the Workspace graphic user interface. Through this they can compile game code into an executable and then run it in realtime on whatever target platform is available within the system. This can be done as Studio uses a platform-specific file format for each platform, such as PS2 and Xbox.

Using Studio means, therefore, that artists, level editors or even designers can get a game running on a platform without input from a programmer. This is important so artists can check the quality of their models and textures in situ. Game designers, in contrast, can tweak an object's parameters running in-game and in realtime. As well as objects, gameplay items such as AI triggers and character collision bounding boxes can be visualised in order to tweak or check behaviours. And because the system components are connected via the Manager, when new art assets are updated to the game database, they can be made available to users immediately.

"Some people get confused and think RenderWare Studio is just a realtime level editor, but it's much more than this," says Whitfield. For example, when an executable runs on a target game console, it has actually been built using the code direct from the source control system. One advantage of this is seen, literally, within Workspace as its physical appearance can be generated by the game code itself. "A programmer decorates his source code for say, a particle effect, with attribute tags which are pulled out by Studio Manager," says Whitfield. "These are then used to create the simple slider menus for object properties within Workspace, which in this case are things like colour, gravity and particle size.

"When you speak to a game developer, they want to do the graphics and the gameplay, not all the boring stuff on top like getting things to work," Whitfield concludes. "And that's exactly what RenderWare Studio allows them to do."





Criterion has been testing RenderWare Studio using id's open source Quake engine as the screenshots above show





RenderWare Studio brings together all Criterion's game development technology into an single collaborative environment



RenderWare Studio allows artists, programmers, game designers and level editors to work together within a realtime development system

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



'Zzap! 64' encouraged Commodore worship, and a few playground fisticuffs with Spectrum owners









Virtua Fighter 4 proved to be one of the most anticipated releases in recent memory



Queues in Akihabara reached around the block, suggesting that the market is picking up in the east

01 Return of the mag

UK: Commodore 64 fetishists rejoice. The return of 'Zzap! 64' after exactly eight years proves that there may be life in the old machine yet. Alas, you won't find the popular magazine on the newsstands but those willing to take the time to download the 30Mb pdf from www.zzap64.co.uk will be able to relive the heady days of POKES and machine code. Of course, there's not much in the way of fresh reviews – although news of a device to get your C64 running at 20Mhz shouldn't be sniffed at – it's more a chance to wallow in nostalgia and check your highest *Paradroid* tally against that of the Scorelord. There is also ample scope in edition 107 for rampant dissing of Spectrum users and the lionisation of retro heroes Jeff Minter and Rob Hubbard. A 221Kb 'Megatape' with classics such as *Elite*, *Impossible Mission*, *The Sentinel* and *Wizball* completes the package – though purists may complain that the absence of Sellotape damaging the front cover is a modernisation too far.

02 Virtua Fighter Phwoar!

Japan: The launch of Sega's *Virtua Fighter 4* on January 31 was obviously an attractive proposition to Japanese gamers. Hundreds of beat 'em up fans queued obediently outside game stores all over Tokyo and a massive 360,000 copies were sold on the first day alone – not to mention a number of books and themed gifts. Although special members of staff were employed to ensure order was maintained in the streets, queue dodging is rarely a problem in Japan. Unlike in the game, then.

Soundbytes

"Last year at testing I play a lot of PlayStation. We used to do a lotta those driving games. That's why I gave it up. Man, they are not even close to the real things. Not even close."
'The Guardian' reports on Juan Pablo Montoya's dabbling with videogames in its sports section

"When I spit it out in digital format, I'll be able to pump out something the world has not seen before."
Hideo Kojima gracefully comments on his honour of becoming one of the world's most influential figures of 2002 in 'Newsweek'

"Just as you think Microsoft's superior engine or Sony's vast armoury has clinched victory, the warriors of Nintendo send in their secret weapon: a short, grinning Japanese man called Shigeru Miyamoto."
Typically, 'The Times' dumbs-down its coverage of anything videogame related

"Sadly, in a game which refuses to incorporate extras such as weapons or magic powers, it seems as if creativity has finally run dry."
'FHM' laments the lack of pyrotechnics in its *DOA3* review

03 Total control

Japan: Although driving lessons are not obligatory it seems likely that the mammoth controller due to launch alongside Capcom's *Tekki* (see page 39) will take a while to get the hang of. With as many as 50 independent switches and buttons a number of start-up procedures must be followed before your mech warrior even lurches into action. Build quality is said to be high and although a price has yet to be set it looks as if the peripheral will eventually become as treasured as the maracas accompanying Sega's *Samba de Amigo*.

04 Porn again Pong

France: Nintendo might have dominated this year's Milia (see last issue for a full show report), but to the true connoisseur of electronic entertainment the show's real highlights lay elsewhere. On the stand opposite in fact, which featured *Mixed Reality Pong*; a technological experiment by the Media Lab at Helsinki's UIAH that allows the use of real world objects, such as courgettes and peppers, to interact with a virtual pong ball.

Or on the Private Media stand, where Korean company Mediall Tech was displaying its phenomenal touchscreen all in one CD-vending kiosk, which incorporated pizza adverts, karaoke, disco lights, and CDs customised with a personalised picture and message. Sadly, although it is possible to download audio, music and PC games onto these CDs, the only content available at Milia was hardcore pornography.

05 Advance DIY

Japan: The prospect of seeing GBA games on the big screen is something that any *Kuru Kuru Kururin* devotee would appreciate. GameTech of Japan aims to satisfy this very need with its Televi De Advance, a device that connects the Game Boy Advance to a television via a ribbon that must be lodged inside the GBA. Bundled with two mini screwdrivers and a manual that looks like that of a Lego kit, the Televi De Advance is mildly challenging to install. Unfortunately, the video quality – despite being outputted through an S-video cable – is woeful. Super Famicom owners can rest assured that theirs is the only true way to enjoy *Super Mario World* in the home.

Data Stream

Date Square's *Final Fantasy XI* is to launch in Japan alongside Sony's PlayOnline service: **May 16**

Amount Japanese gamers will have to pay for the service per month: **¥1,280 (£7)**

Amount *Metal Gear Solid 2* grossed in the US in its first week: **$12.7 (£9m)**

Number of units Capcom has so far shifted of *Devil May Cry*: **2m**

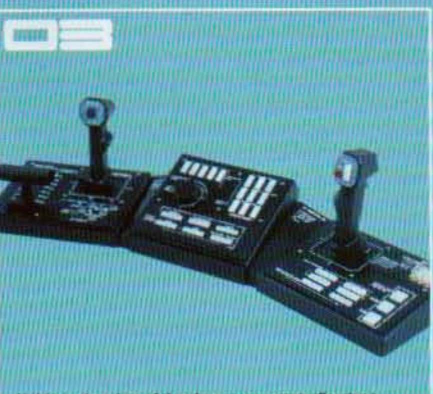
Percentage of white-collar workers in major cities an NOP study found used email to point out others' mistakes while jockeying to advance their careers: **38%**

Number of mobile phones stolen last year in Britain, according to Continental Research: **1.3m**

Number of mobile phones accidentally dropped down the lavatory in Britain, according to the same research: **600,000**

Amount Forrester Research expects product placement to be worth to by 2005: **$705**

Number of occupations in Square's *Final Fantasy XI*: **14**



If this is the size of the Japanese controller, just imagine how big the western version will be





Despite Mediall's limited choice of content, Edge's ad team seemed happy with their Milia souvenirs





Proving that courgettes do have a purpose, *Mixed Reality Pong* was one of the highlights of Milia



Televi De Advance could have been a neat bit of kit but it's hardly worth breaking your warranty over







Perhaps it's not the most relaxing image to drink a pint to, but it's another example of videogame 'art'



The joy, the ecstasy, the face of a man about to lose a life and his dignity in 'We Will Destroy You'

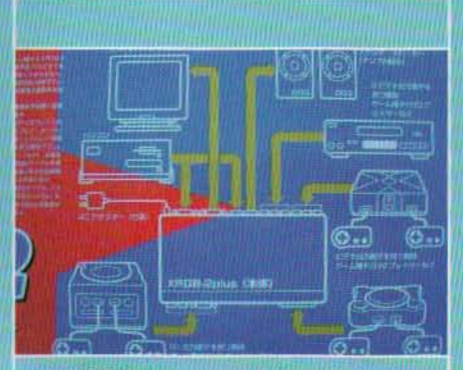


The team behind *Icarus-X*, Inverse Cinematics, won first prize in the Dundee scheme, Dare to be Digital



CEO of VIS entertainment, Chris van der Kuyl (left), backed the project which produced *Icarus-X* (above)





The XRGB-2 is an impressive kit for cable-heads, but it's not likely to push sales of the Xbox in Japan

06 Facial Invaders

UK: Designed and produced by **Chris Evans** (regular readers will remember his last project, Pavement Pong from **E**106, page 18) 'We Will Destroy You' explores videogame culture in a singularly unusual way. Simply put, a *Space Invaders* cabinet is placed into a bar or cafe and a hidden camera catches every facial reaction of the player and projects it on to a 15ft high screen. "It appears that the player of the game is actually focusing their destructive powers on the customers," says Evans. The installation ran from February 2 until February 15 at the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff, though Evans hopes that it will eventually tour to a pub near you. Check out www.wewilldestroyyou.com for more.

07 Digital Dundee

UK: 'Dare to be Digital' is a project set up by Scottish Enterprise Tayside, Dundee City council and Abertay University to encourage students to hone their e-commerce skills. The scheme invites undergraduates to develop their own digital media company over the summer vacation and turn their ideas into a viable commercial success. Previous projects have ranged from management databases to multiplayer flight games and students can earn £150 per week with the ultimate winners winning prizes of £2500 and £1000. Applications are now being accepted, though arts students should be aware that the course runs during daylight hours. Go to www.embreonix.com for more.

08 XRGB SFX

Japan: A convenient and impressive solution for RGB-hungry gamers, Micomsoft's latest XRGB hardware iteration impresses with its clarity and convenience. The unit upscans RGB (via component, D-video or RGB cables) from any console to any VGA or XGA monitor. The resulting sparkle far surpasses that of the cheap VGA adapters that clog EB's shelves. All-important features such as scanline and gamma options justify the unit's ¥25,000 (£135) price tag. Designed in Japan, primarily for native use, the XRGB-2 plus is (when used with a good display) an import gamer's dream.

Continue

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Quit

***Jet Set Radio Future* sales in Japan**
Under 10,000... gulp
Rabid fanboys
For letting emotion and stupidity get in the way of reason
Parisian press trips
The horror of losing a journalist for 24 hours



09 Boo Hoo

It all seems like ancient history now. Like ying, the dotcom boom is not a term that can be invoked without its yang, dotbomb. Of course, plenty of journalists have come out with books full of retrospective self-justification on how Internet businesses in the late 1990s were obviously unsustainable. 'Boo Hoo' is different in that this time it's one of the entrepreneurs at the helm, and he's certainly not making any excuses.

Ernst Malmsten started out as a poetry event organiser in his native Lund, Sweden. From there, a chance meeting with model and ex-kindergarten acquaintance Kajsa Leander led to them launching a trendy publishing house, LeanderMalmsten. And as things happened back then, this became a online book retailer called bokus, which was acquired by a large Swedish retailer. It still exists as part of bol.com.

And it's at this point that the madness really starts. Flush with their success, Malmsten and Leander decided to launch boo.com, an online retailer for fashion and sports goods. It was the darling of the Europe business world, worth almost $400 million before it had sold a single item. It had 400 staff and offices in five countries, it threw lavish parties for beautiful people. It was a disaster waiting to happen. It ran out of money in May 2000.

Don't read this book to get a good business overview of Boo's rise and fall. Like its over-exuberant founder, 'Boo Hoo' is not subjective. Malmsten still thinks boo was a revolutionary business idea, an important part of a golden age. Some people never learn.

10 Double Fold

Edge is unsure whether Nicholson Baker approves of computer games. It doesn't seem like the sort of thing the controversial author of intellectual-cum-masturbatory tomes such as 'Vox' and 'The Fermata' would be interested in. Yet Baker's books have always had something of the virtual about them, so maybe he'd understand the lure. His latest, 'Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper' poses some difficult questions concerning the relationship between the real and a technologically-driven future however.

Granted the subject matter itself – the process by which the great research libraries of the UK and the US have junked most of their original newspaper collections instead choosing to hold them on microfilm and digital formats – is unlikely to spark a lot of interest in the games playing fraternity. But the issues Baker raises are valid across a wide range of areas.

Perhaps the key point he makes concerns the technological imperative; what's new is best and can't be stopped. Unfortunately, as he discovers, in the case of libraries' collections, many of the microfilm copies of newspapers are now unusable. But with the originals long since thrown away, they cannot return to the source material. Equally, one of the premises of using microfilm copies, that newsprint falls apart after 50 years, has proved to be completely false.

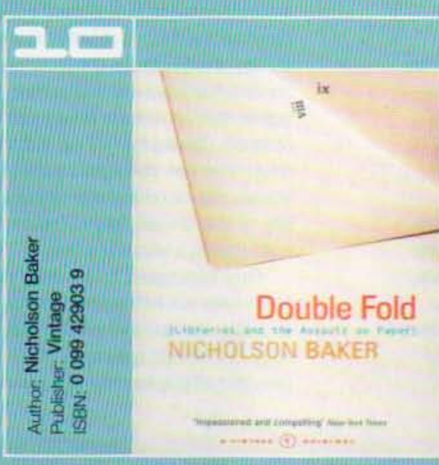
What's important Baker seems to be saying is, don't get overwhelmed by technology for its own sake. Think about what people actually use it for. Or to put it in a videogaming context – remember there are more PSones and sub-Pentium 2 PCs out there than PlayStation2s and 2GHz P4s.

09



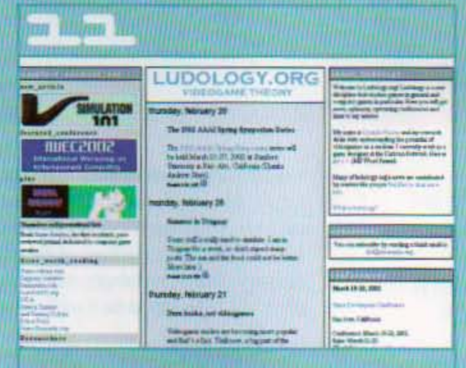
Author: Ernst Malmsten
Publisher: Random House
ISBN: 0 7126 7239 7

10



Author: Nicholson Baker
Publisher: Vintage
ISBN: 0 099 42903 9

11



Site: **Ludology.org**
URL: **www.jacaranda.org/frasca/weblog/**

11 Website of the month

Dedicated to exploring the intellectual side of games, Ludology.org is well worth checking out if you have a theory about why women love *Tetris* so much (it's the tidying up dynamic, surely). Covering a number of topics from book burning to the potential of online communities the site is a haven for those who want to engage with videogames on a more abstract plane.

12 Advertainm

Japan: Fittingly, the advert for Japanese Xbox lau game *Nezmix* features a song by Folder 5, a new pitiful J-pop idols group featuring (surprisingly) fiv talentless individuals united by their record label.



For reasons the ad agency might be able to disc a group of karate black belts try to mimick *Nezm*



So they run on the beach, because the mice in *Nezmix* run. They crawl on all fours because...



... *Nezmix* mice crawl. They kick impressively int the air...



... er, because the mice in the game sort of fight. And they chat to each other...



... because mice chat. Then with a triumphant c they reach for the sky...



... because that's the only way to turn yourself in *Nezmix* mouse.



And everyone's happy. Pity the game is still rubb

Surprise. It is, as the intro goes, a day much like any other; in this case the afternoon of Wednesday, February 6, in the classroom of an elementary school in north Philadelphia. A female police officer, arriving at the school to pick up her son, holds an impromptu show-and-tell with a classroom of ten-year-olds. First she shows the kids her badge. They coo. Then she shows her gun, a loaded Glock 9mm semi-automatic. They beg to touch it. Regardless of your stance on hands-on firearm education, this is human stupidity in full effect. Watch.

She takes the live cartridge out – does not think to check the chamber – and passes the gun to the children. They pass it around. Twist it in their hands, point it, grip. All your friends are potential snipers. This situation carries a weight of inevitability – did not think to check the chamber – and little mistakes echo larger repercussions. The Gods hold their breath and wait for the bang. We *all* wait for the bang, but it doesn't come, and we exhale as the last child hands the Glock back to the officer. And, as she slides the clip back into the grip, as we relax, she squeezes the trigger just a fraction too hard, and there is that bang, and screaming, and one of the children is covered in blood.

Just a graze, as it happens. Five stitches across the side of their face. And the surprise? That just for once, no-one blamed it on videogames. Lucky. People are stupid.

As RedEye writes these words, it is exactly one month later. Two days ago, March 4, US federal Judge Lewis Babcock dismissed a lawsuit brought by the family of a teacher murdered at Columbine. The suit claimed punitive damages against Acclaim, Activision, Capcom, Eidos, Infogrames, Interplay, Nintendo and SCEA for their part in the massacre. The family's claim against Squaresoft, originally included in the suit, was dropped, possibly because someone pointed out the killers didn't use a turn-based method of combat. They used guns, remember? Those black pointy things you can buy at Kmart.

But it's not just firearm offences we're responsible for. Two weeks ago, a BBC News report revealed that fat kids in Britain are getting fatter, and appear to be developing a form of diabetes as a result. RedEye will leave you to guess the attributed cause, but it's not the BBC's delectable new season of programming. A week before that, RedEye switched on the radio, and heard a doctor warning parents of the dangers of 'videogame rumble boards', a very real hazard that can cause your hands to turn white and stop working. Last week, a woman from Louisiana launched a suit against Nintendo, claiming the N64 fully culpable for the death of her son. It's alleged the machine gave him seizures; still, he continued to play it for eight hours a day, six days a week, right up until he hit his head on a table during a seizure and died.

People are stupid. To help those who report such stories out, here are this month's controversies-in-waiting. *Hooligans: Storm Over Europe* was a joke at ECTS 2000 and again at ECTS 2001, the developer offering free beer to anyone who could stomach watching the tedious trad-RTS nonsense for long enough. It's not so much of a joke now it's out and number one in mainland Europe, albeit only in the Dutch chart. It got there on the promise of evil mayhem, not on the strength of the experience it offers, but, even with all the ill will in the world, it's really not evil. Click here to smash a shop, click here to recruit a different thug. It's boring.

The other current contender for 'Daily Mail' headline status, *State of Emergency*, isn't evil either, just really shit. And, at the time of writing, it's the best selling console game in the country. There's a case for calling the people behind the cynical promotion ("From the makers of *GTAIII*" – you lying bastards) evil, but really the blame for the game's success lies with every magazine who pimped it so heavily before Take 2 decided to withhold review code.

Videogames can harm people: last month's *Rez*-induced twisted eyes are testament to that. But they harm in the same way anything can, by stupid human over-indulgence, not by having the Devil encoded on a DVD. This month's most potentially malevolent videogames, games that the PRs would claim are powerful enough to incite riots, or at least to warrant a couple of inches in the tabloids, aren't capable of inspiring anything more than tedium. *Doom*'s flicker gave RedEye nightmares, but it never made him feel any more comfortable with a shotgun.

There are plenty of other bad things we can definitively pin on videogames, of course. The 'bip… bip' noise of someone else playing *Snake* on the train. The 'Mario Bros' film, and the 'Mortal Kombat' TV series. Activision's PR department. Several million badly-written games magazines. Minor indiscretions aplenty, but the real point is this: you can make the most violent videogame in the world, code it as addictive as crack, cover the box with razor blades and soak the manual in liquid cyanide, and it still won't be as deadly as a gun in the hand of someone who wants to kill. Same with books, film, whatever. Every form of media has the potential to propagate some kind of imbecilic mythology, and overdosing on the wrong thing can turn a fractured mind into a broken one. The answer is to watch for the overdose, not ban the drug.

Because if we're to move forward as an industry, self-censorship can't be an option. We can't afford to worry about the mainstream press and lazy reportage, or to fret that those who don't understand videogames will try and pin every single bad thing life throws at them on Mario, Sonic, et al. If we remove everything that could offend everyone, and we'll end up with nothing left but the benign and candyfloss, and this media – like any other – has the potential to be so much more. People are stupid, but we have to allow developers the freedom to create what they want, and entrust the press with the task of education. And the killer is that so much of the gaming press is stupid, too; they have the loaded gun, and they're fumbling around with it as the general public looks on. RedEye stares down the barrel. Bang. No surprise.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Stupidity: don't blame the games

Games can harm people, but they harm in the same way anything can, by human over-indulgence, not by having the Devil encoded on a DVD

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'*s*

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TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Eye candy: too sickly for hardcore gamers?

First, an admission. I am a graphics whore. Supposedly, this is one of the most lacerating insults in the malign lexicon of the self-defined 'hardcore gamer'. Real gamers, you see, are above all that. They can masterfully distinguish good gameplay from mere pretty visuals, and would rather have the former every time. Only the PS2-owning masses, the despised 'casuals', are deceived by something so trivial as good looks.

Eye candy is called eye candy for a reason – because it's sweet. Videogames are a multimedia artform, and one of those media is the visual. Show me a game that makes only a half-arsed attempt at visual excellence, because it's so confident about its other strengths, and I'll show you a game that could have been even better if it had been prettier. We must be careful when drawing analogies between videogames and cinema, but try this one. Would 'Blade Runner' be as good if the story were told with hand puppets in a cardboard set? Or if Harrison Ford were replaced by Johnny Vegas?

The question is the same in games. Would *Jet Set Radio* be as good if it resembled *Paperboy*? Would *Soul Calibur* be as unforgettable if it had exactly the same combat mechanics but had the same visuals as *Way of the Exploding Fist*? And surely one of the most superlative aspects of *Rez* is the joyful way in which it reconstructs the history of videogame representation in realtime, to a pumping beat: moving from *Tron* or *Battlezone*-style wireframe to a gorgeously stylised, solid-polygon world. Take that away and do it all in the style of *3D Monster Maze*. Just as good? I don't think so.

Naturally there are exceptions to this sensual law. *Tetris*, for example. None of the countless *Tetris* sequels and 'reinterpretations' have been better games for having whizzy coloured graphics. Equally, however, they have not been worse simply because they have looked nicer. But this follows from the ultimately symbolic nature of the game, and those like it, such as *Super Bust-a-Move* or chess. The vast majority of today's videogames are not purely abstract in the same way. And as you move away from abstraction, you'd better have some visual style to stop yourself looking like bad, low-res television.

Why has this myth about the irrelevance of visual quality in videogames come about? Here's why: it's down to the ambiguous nature of the term 'graphics'. When we say 'graphics', it is often not clear whether we are talking about the aesthetic quality of the designed image, or the technical virtues of that image – resolution, detail, lighting effects and so on. This has entailed an idea that 'graphics whores' are people who think that games are always better if they use the latest GPU and have the most fanatically detailed environments. The truth is that such considerations are largely irrelevant. The true visual sensualist considers the visual style independently of the system that it is running on. That is why we can agree that *Vib Ribbon* looks splendid. That is why I prefer *Wipeout 3* to *Wipeout Fusion* in every way, including visually. *Wipeout 3*'s environments are not as detailed as those of its successor, but they have an aesthetic coherence and an overall design character that is far more pleasing to my adrenaline-glazed eyes.

This points to a response to the tired old graphics-versus-gameplay argument from a historical perspective. If *Defender* is arguably as good as or superior to any modern-day shoot 'em up, the argument runs, that must be because visuals are irrelevant to gameplay pleasure. After all, look at it: it's low-res, it's not 3D, and so on. But to argue this way is rather to miss the point that *Defender* remains an extraordinarily beautiful game. There is no point attempting to improve the visuals because they accomplish their job with such great élan in the first place: those fizzing rainbow lasers, those particulate explosions, the amazing amount of menace squeezed into the few pixels that constitute a mutant. It is the style of the visual image, rather than just the brute quantity of information packed into it, that counts to the true graphics whore.

Similarly, the discerning graphics whore does not care how good an image looks in screenshots if it doesn't move properly. For some reason, there's a tendency in firstperson shooters – *Red Faction* springs to mind – to marshall grimly all the computing power available in producing moody, pseudo-realistic environments, and then to populate these environments with insultingly jerky approximations of human movement. Good animation is an essential tool to encourage the player's psychological projection into the gameworld.

The ideal situation, of course, is for the brute informational quantity embedded in the visual image to grow, without stultifying style. Because it can hardly be denied that better graphics (in the technical sense) can allow for innovations in gameplay. You wouldn't improve *Defender* by upgrading its innards to 128bit, but you would make an entirely different sort of game – such as *Halo* – possible.

The problem we have with contemporary games is not that everyone is concentrating on flashy graphics per se, but that aesthetic innovation has lagged behind technical innovation, for understandable and purely practical reasons – the pressure of development cycles, for instance, or the plain fact that there are never enough truly talented artists to go round in any industry.

It is the style of the image, rather than just the brute quantity of information packed into it, that counts to the true graphics whore

But when authentic artistic imagination is married to contemporary technology – as in *Ico* – the result is a game where looks are supremely relevant, firstly because they define so beautifully the psychological atmosphere of the game; secondly, because with the technical power available to create *Ico*'s gorgeously grandiose architecture, they actually constitute the context in which such haunting gameplay is allowed. In fact, the distinction between those two terms – graphics and gameplay – is almost obliterated. And we can count ourselves fortunate that such a game is now possible. We can, finally, rejoice in being graphics whores.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

The other day, there was this press release. Here is the content. Namco, Sega and Nintendo are joining forces to establish the next-generation arcade board 'Triforce', based on the home gaming console Nintendo GameCube. This project has three main objectives:

1. To widen the arcade videogame market.
2. To provide an effective cost-performance capable of delivering great arcade videogame titles.
3. To extend the way people enjoy arcade and consumer gaming by developing a bridge between them both.

The three companies will combine their know-how and technology to design new types of gaming and revive both arcade and consumer markets via Triforce.

Well, in a few words, GameCube comes to the arcade. The games developed on this board would be very easy to port on the console. I guess this is a magnetic strip for data access and the card is quite strong. It is also light and can easily take its place inside a wallet. There is not a single person without a card. Bank, VISA, security pass for the company, ID, billiard club member, etc. Well, I have around 15 of them with me all the time. So taking the card as the medium for this gaming concept was appropriate.

Now, let's imagine we had chosen a different medium like a 3.5-inch disk. Well, this would be too big, difficult to carry. Now, what if we had a 3cm RAM card? It would be too small, not resistant enough. No need to say you could lose it somewhere very easily. Both styles are not suitable.

Talking about videogames, Dreamcast was the very first to offer the VMS as a possible medium. It offered to establish a bridge between consumer and arcade markets. It was small, and it provided and opportunity to play very basic games on it. It was as big as the Tamagochi, but the VMS was not has to be held in a pocket. They have already many items in their pocket. That makes the problem even greater since you have to introduce a new item in their, already very filled, pockets.

So for all these reasons, there was no other choice than a credit card-size medium. This card takes up little space in a user's wallet and it has been rapidly adopted. This is certainly the secret of its success. If you think back to the VMS experience, the idea to link consumer and arcade was not bad at all. It was just its style, which was bad. So style is very important. Plus, you have to create a reason to have this card with you. Then comes the problem of the game content. Both aspects are important but, to me, the style issue is predominant, especially at the current time. Young people are not starved of fun and information. You can design the best content possible but if the style is not friendly, they will not try it, or enjoy it. The game design is meaningless.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Style: over substance?

good thing. But do you remember? When the Xbox was announced in Japan there was another announcement, just after, stating the development of a new arcade board based on the console. Plus, with regards to PS2, System 246 is already a reality.

So now, we have every console translated into a custom arcade board. So what? Will this have any impact? Will this revive the game centres and will the industry's revival be enhanced? Well... It sounds quite difficult. There are not many changes as I have said before. Users don't care about hardware specifications. They don't care if a game is made on a given architecture. It is nonsense to me. I mean, the ultimate factor is the content. Then will come the gameplay, the way you are going to enjoy it.

Japan's newest and most interesting arcade gameplay trend is the introduction of the card system. To me, this has a tremendous impact. It allows users to save data on the card. You can store a lot of information such as your level, your character, points and score, etc so you can resume your play in another game centre.

The reasons why this system is currently meeting a wide success are numerous. To me, one of these reasons is the system style. I mean the medium, a card, is a good choice. It includes a very successful. People were not attracted to it. Maybe the games were not good enough? Or perhaps the VMS was not resistant enough? Well, I heard many things but what I found very damaging about this concept was the VMS' style. It was just not suitable. Its failure was not about its size at all.

You can design the best content possible but if the style is not friendly, young people will not try it, or enjoy it

No, it was just that the VMS was unable to slip into the players' lifestyle, their fashion.

There are basic items you would find in any kid's or adult's bag, right? It is hard to introduce a new item among these basic items. It has to be very useful or easy to transport in order to become one of the basic items. The mobile phone is one these new items which successfully fitted into people's life and became another basic item. So if you consider a simple game medium, it can't offer the same level of interest as mobile phones. I mean it is just a medium, without any utility. Recreating a similar success with such an item, it is very hard.

Moreover, if you consider women, they usually have a bag. Look at game centre users. They are mainly male and don't have a bag. So this medium

Well, saying that, I feel very sad about Sega losing Dreamcast. Why? Because the console disappeared just when something was about to start. This 'play style' was certainly one of them. I also have the feeling that people were starting to understand the potential of this new concept as well.

Yes, there was something in the air. When we had the hardware business active, it was very easy for us to bring our new ideas and, eventually, include them into a new hardware project. Now this is over. I feel really sad. Anyway, that is over so we must face the future and especially this play style we made reality through our card system.

My point is all these next-generation consoles should have the same credit card-size memory card, even if they are not the same from one platform to another. That way, the way you would enjoy games could be different. Hardware manufacturers, please, consider my idea. See you.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Hello to all of you, people of the world. I'm Lupin Kojima from 'Game Wave DVD' (a games magazine published on a DVD in Japan). There are many network games out there (Internet and mobile) but at the end of 2001, I encountered an incredible online game – *Final Fantasy XI*. Square intends to release the game this spring in Japan. I'm currently taking part in the beta test, so I would like to take this time to talk about the game through different episodes. Log in.

The first land I walked in, Vana Deel, exceeded all my expectations with its beauty and scale. Numerous green trees, wide and infinite lands and high mountains. Clouds pass and the sun sets. Then the darkness of the night makes your progression really difficult. Later the sun rises and lights the landscape with a very sharp brightness. I spent an entire day looking at this environment. I really was under the charm of this Vana Deel beauty. The reluctant adventurer that I am, I felt a lot of anxiety in front of such a vast world: what could I do in the middle of such a space?





TOKYO GAME LIFE

Lupin Kojima, sub editor-in-chief, 'Game Wave DVD'

Kojima-san burns the midnight oil exploring Final Fantasy XI

The first country I travelled to was the mining state of the Bastook Republic. I discovered markets on paved streets and houses made of stone. It seemed to me a very wealthy country with a lot of healthy people passing around. This country is very famous for its mining activities, which provide it with a lot of raw materials such as iron and 'mistril'. They are used to make weapons, which are well known throughout the entire continent. People from the other countries, Sandoria and Windearth, and from remote locations come here to buy them. I bought a sword and some armour there and started my exploration of the country.

I met an old man who asked me a favour, my first quest. I had to bring a shield made of some creature's carapace to a friend of the old man. Then I had to bring this friend back to the old man. Well, I was confused. Where could I find the shield and where was the friend? The old man did not give me much information, so I decided to ask for information from a man passing nearby.

"Where can I find a shield made of a carapace?" "I have several of them. Do you want one?" This man gave me the shield and few pieces of advice. I completed my mission and decided that this country was the right place for me to live. My experience as an adventurer increased then a little.

The world of Vana Deel is divided into three major countries. These are the Bastook Republic, the Federation of Windearth and the Kingdom of Sandoria. People like me belong to one of these nations and evolve freely into this vast land, making their own story. Beginners have to go outside the castle, confronting the reality of Vana Deel. I met a few little creatures which I fought. That way, I managed to make my character stronger.

As I was fighting alone, two people came to me and asked if I would join them to make a party. I was confused at first by this sudden request but, well, here was my first party experience, so I accepted. One was a white magician, specialised in healing magic. The other one was a thief, very fast. And me, I'm a fighter. Leaving the castle behind, we spoke about fight tactics before starting our journey deeper into the land.

Then I experienced my first party battle. It was totally different from solo combat. My role was to serve as a shield. As a fighter, my strength was important and I had to protect the others from our adversary. The thief used his ability to strike the monster from behind, using his knife. If you're able to perform lots of attacks it prevents the enemy from using his magic, or weakens him so he can't use his power. Then apart, from a distance, out of the enemy's range, the white magician was able to cast his magic on us or inform us about the situation. Sometimes, he would even give orders.

Alone, your survival is limited in [Final Fantasy XI]. However, combining your skills with others, you understand you can perform well

Alone, your survival is limited in this world. However, combining your skills with others, you understand you can perform well. This was another experience, which further reinforced my character.

Passing through mountains, rivers and forests, I increased my experience as an adventurer. I managed to make many friends. I started to understand the basic rules of survival. But as humans get stronger, they start to build ambitions. I started to wish for accessories to complete my equipment, which consisted of a simple sword and armour. Then I noticed a very rare ring on the hand of another adventurer, I could not wait to ask him where he found it. He told me it was only available in a remote mining town, to the north of Bastook. I had a strong feeling, as if I really needed it. Then, alone, I decided to go there. As I went deeper in a dark tunnel, I met a mushroom-shaped monster. I took my sword and fought it but I had a feeling that this battle was different. I decided to stop the fight and run away. But I was in a desperate situation and I found myself on the floor.

The next day, I told my experience to a friend; the ring, the northern mining town, the mushroom monster, etc. Then I got told off by my friend because I had gone there alone. I apologised and we formed a party to go to this place again. We defeated the monster and got the magic ring. I don't know if it is because my eye adapted to the darkness of the place but when we got outside, I was completely dazzled by the sunlight. Looking at the surrounding and my friends, I kept the ring strongly in my hand. I felt as though the ring in my hand was shining.

Log out. Returning to the reality, I ended the game. Here as well, the rising sun outside was dazzling. The light ring is the very first item you get in the game. Onscreen the character was not grabbing strongly the ring inside his hand, no, but this is what I felt playing the game. I had the feeling that this was a very precious item, worth more than any car or branded item.

This is the story of each adventurer. *Final Fantasy XI* is interesting. Lighting my cigarette, I figured out that I had been playing all night. Under the dazzling light of the rising sun and rubbing my sleepy eyes, I went to work. My January Tokyo Game Life.

Lupin Kojima is the sub editor-in-chief of 'Game Wave DVD', part of the Famitsu publishing portfolio



Edge's most wanted

MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology

One stick controls the body's position on the bike, the other, tilt and acceleration. It's all wonderfully well implemented and promises a thrilling experience.

(Xbox) THQ



Tekki

Edge's continual love affair with big robots continues unabated, so forgive our excitement when it comes to Capcom's mech simulation and its peripheral.

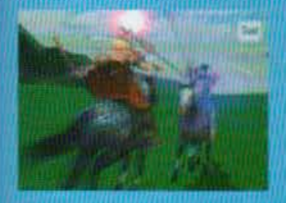
(Xbox) Capcom



Kessen II

Thanks to THQ, the sequel to Koei's undeservedly overlooked console strategy title will be coming to these shores, replete with histrionic magic and tactics.

(PlayStation2) THQ



Grand Prix 4

PC gamers constantly rave about the engrossing simulation aspects of Crammond's F1 series. Now console gamers will find out what all the fuss is about.

(Xbox) Infogrames



Superman lives

On Xbox *and* PlayStation2

The announcement of Superman's latest videogame outing hasn't often been cause for celebration. Ever since the days of the Atari 2600, the franchise has been synonymous with dodgy digital conversions. It's probably too early to tell whether *Shadow of Apokolips* on PlayStation2 and *The Man of Steel* on Xbox will break with tradition and actually be any good, but either way, his latest adventures are setting a positive precedent in other ways. Amid a sea of generic ports across different hardware formats, publisher Infogrames has bravely decided to bring out two separate Superman titles, to take specific advantage of their host hardware platforms.

Given the high cost of developing games for existing home platforms, and the current low installed base of GameCube and Xbox, most publishers seem content to use PlayStation2 code as the basis of any multiformat strategies. Which is perfectly understandable: after all, why take an unnecessary financial risk developing for a console that, as yet, is an unproven quantity, when it's possible to take advantage of revenue opportunities with minimal outlay? Sadly for gamers, the resulting conversions don't take advantage of the unique feature sets of the other two consoles.

Each console has its own development strengths and weaknesses. While PlayStation2 has Vector Units to facilitate data management on the fly, Xbox has a hard drive and the nVidia GPU. GameCube, meanwhile, benefits from ease of development and boasts a joypad that isn't strictly comparable to the more conventional controllers of PlayStation2 or Xbox. To deliver the best results on each platform, the ideal solution is to develop specifically for each platform, to take advantage of their particular strengths.

Unfortunately, this is likely to be an all too rare occurrence while Xbox and GameCube are in the process of establishing a foothold. Which is a shame for a couple of reasons. First, a relative lack of content targeted specifically at either platform is likely to hamper their respective attempts to establish a foothold. And second, it deprives us of the broad variety of gaming experiences that the existence of three consoles should, in theory, provide us with.

Of course publishers can't be blamed for this situation, and titles like *Genma Onimusha* and *Silent Hill 2* show that meagre efforts are being taken to optimise content for different platforms. But it is a regrettable state of affairs, and in bucking the trend, Infogrames deserves respect.









Superman: The Man of Steel

Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! But will the Xbox be capable of handling a decent Superman title?



Getting the balance right between Superman's near omnipotence and the level of threat required to create a challenge is essential to the success of *The Man of Steel*. Brainiac 13's mentalist powers should help





Infogrames boasts that the Metropolis cityscape will be both huge and detailed. Which seems rather appropriate given the mythic proportions of The Last Son of Krypton's personality

Perhaps it's down to a hangover from pre-millennial tension. Or post-millennial optimism. Or a feeling of impotence in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster. But whatever the sociological reasons, superheroes seem to be back with a vengeance. Every other Hollywood announcement seems to indicate a further superheroic celluloid outing of some sort these days, be it Ang Lee's 'The Hulk' or Darren Aronofsky's 'Batman: Year One'. What's more, the gritty noir realities of the post-'Watchmen' wave of comicbook deconstructionism seem to have given way to an upbeat wave of retro optimism, with prominent writers such as Alan Moore and Grant Morrison turning their talents to more bright and breezy subject matter.

Since he's arguably one of the most recognisable superheroes on the planet, it therefore comes as no surprise that Superman himself should benefit from this wave of comicbook euphoria – in the shape of 'Dawson's Creek' meets 'The X-Files' crossover, 'Smallville', for example. It should also come as no surprise to learn of the latest publisher, Infogrames, to attempt to do justice to Superman's uniquely moralistic brand of omnipotence within the framework of a videogame. Of course the history of The Last Son of Krypton is littered with less than stellar digital conversions; while the comicbook medium allows significant scope to curtail Superman's unprecedented might in the interest of dramatic conflict, videogame developers have found the task much more arduous.



Nevertheless, developer Circus Freak Studios is confident that the current wave of console technology is up to the task. As the company's president, **Caroline Esmurdoc**, explains, "The great thing about Superman is that he is so powerful. We want the player to experience that feeling to its fullest. To that end all of Superman's vast array of powers will be available to the player at all times. Flight, speed, strength, heat vision, telescopic vision, x-ray vision, and frost breath will all be usable throughout the game. Superman can use his telescopic and x-ray vision to assess danger and respond appropriately." No mention yet, though, of a 'bullet-time' superspeed mode, à la 'Smallville', and this would make a welcome addition to the game's mechanics.

In order to provide an adequate set of challenges for such a comprehensive set of talents, *The Man of Steel* takes place across range of locations drawn from the comicboc franchise – from a highly detailed recreation Metropolis to the Phantom Zone and Warworld. Taking on the might of the transmogrified Y2K villain, Brainiac 13, as w as arch-nemesis Lex Luthor, Superman has to fulfil a range of objectives such as avertin disasters, protecting innocent citizens, and containing environmental damage. And of course, there's the odd bout of fisticuffs.

"One specific example of our innovative implementation of Superman's powers is ou inertial flight mechanic," continues Esmurdo "Superman is able to lift huge objects, but they will still retain their mass so he will have to carefully manoeuvre them into their corre positions. It will take skill and precision on th part of the player. We also plan to provide th players' challenges that will take combinations of Superman's powers. For

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Circus Freak Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Autumn**









While the N64 incarnation of Superman suffered from seriously flawed handling, Circus Freak Studios is confident that lock-on targeting and inertial flight mechanics will leave previous versions in their wake

example, the player might use telescopic and x-ray vision to assess a threat, flight to get to it, and then a variety of combat powers to defeat it."

The developer is also taking measures to ensure an appropriate level of threat – without resorting to the easy option of introducing the destabilising effects of Kryptonite at every available opportunity. "A number of the enemies will be large enough that they will have multiple lock-on points so that Superman can target specific areas on them. Many of the threats will be threatening Metropolis so that Superman must deal with them quickly and in a strategic way in order to succeed."

Furthermore, as an Xbox exclusive, *The Man of Steel* also takes full advantage of the console's unique feature set: notably by supporting Dolby 5.1 3D spatial sound effects and the full range of graphics techniques supported by the nVidia GPU. "The team does not need to make gameplay, technological or visual compromises for the sake of cross-platform compatibility to achieve success," states Esmurdoc.

"The team does not need to make compromises for the sake of cross-platform compatibility to achieve success"

Nevertheless, capturing the monumental essence of the Superman myth always presents a significant design challenge, and no amount of technology is going to change that. However, **Edge** is optimistic that Infogrames can at least lay the horrific memory of Superman's execrable N64 Titus-published outing to rest.



Superman: Shadow of Apokolips

In addition to *The Man of Steel*, Infogrames will also be publishing a second title based on the Superman universe. Developed in-house, *Shadow of Apokolips* is set to appear on PlayStation2, and while *The Man of Steel* is based within the continuity of the Superman comics themselves, the PS2 title will be based on the distinct universe of the animated TV series. Significantly, such a move will give the two development teams a rare chance to take full advantage of the capabilities of their target hardware.

Die Hard: Vendetta

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Bit
Origin: US
Release: Q

John McClane returns for another videogame interpretation of the 'Die Hard' franchise, but dimwitted AI and ordinary level design makes this a less than explosive prospect















Although levels are designed along very traditional lines, there is enough action to prevent boredom from setting in. Controls have been mapped on to the GameCube's controller exceptionally well with a duck command turning into a lean if the c-stick is rotated left or right. A *Zelda*-style automatic jump makes accessing high areas easier

Die Hard' still stands as one of the greatest action movie ever made, so it's with some trepidation that **Edge** comes to the latest digital interpretation of the lone-cop-against-the-terrorist-world franchise. Can a videogame ever do the strength of the licence justice? The original *Die Hard Trilogy* proved to be diverting but stepping into John McClane's shoes for a firstperson translation of the franchise is surely a better way to capture the spirit of the first movie.

Although the game is set after the Nakatomi Plaza incident (McClane's daughter is grown up and, predictably, has fulfilled her destiny to be captured by a terrorist group), the clever dramatic devices of 'Die Hard' – the claustrophobia induced by a single office complex, lethal glass strewn floors and fire-hose leaps of faith – could have made a videogame based on McClane's maverick antics very special. Sadly, such moments are not in evidence. *Die Hard: Vendetta* looks like being another polished but plagiaristic FPS.

If anything, the game resembles the overrated *007: Agent Under Fire*. There's the same dullard AI, with enemies emerging from behind crates (yes, there are lots of crates) to let you pick them off with ease. If you're lucky, one of them might surprise you with his acumen by ducking back behind a crate on the odd occasion, but in general these bad-guys look like they will be depriving a lot of virtual villages of their idiots.

The developer promises that there will be several routes through each level, but in actuality these amount to a limited number of locations which can be tackled with stealth or frenzied violence. Meet some guard dogs, for instance, and you can throw them sausages nicked from a fridge earlier in the level. Alternatively, you can just gun them down. Not entirely the 'freeform' level design pledged. For the most part, typical level triggers must be found to make progress to the next demarcated area of the game. In the warehouse level you must pull a control booth switch to release a truck. This will then provide the final stepping stone for getting over an unscalable wall. It doesn't get much more imaginative than this.

There are some tremendous visual effects – the realtime refraction on windows shows off the GameCube's graphical grunt – and the controls are smooth and intuitive. *Die Hard: Vendetta* is bound to be a well-presented and engaging FPS for the GameCube, just don't expect it to do what *GoldenEye* did for the N64.



Yager

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Yager Team**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **Q3**

"Original, provoking, and rich in storyline," claims the press release. "But is all what it seems?" **Edge** takes a look under Yager's surface and finds out

There are two remarkable things about *Yager*, an aerial combat game that, contrary to phonetic implication, has absolutely nothing to do with retro franchise favourite *Chuck*. The first thing that strikes **Edge** as it notices the *Yager* posters dotted around the Che Bar in central London where the UK press day is being held: there are only a few months left on the development cycle, and arch-marketeer THQ still hasn't given the game a clumsy subtitle.

The second remarkable thing hits as **Edge** watches *Yager*'s lead programmer swoop a tiny fighter across water and around a huge, hovering mothership. Laser fire slices through icebergs and breaks them into ship-sized pieces that tumble and splash into the water. Gulls swoop, turbines spin, particle explosions whirl into smoke fades into cloud. It turns out that *Yager*, superficially at least, is absolutely gorgeous.

Its backstory, formed from oft-visited sci-fi trash novel heroics and character cliché proves less remarkable. It's typical game developer playground stream-of-consciousness. Edited highlights from the overly verbose press release follow: "Powerful Mega Corporations… taken over… civilised world… something stirred up at the Proteus Company… ships and transports crashed… increased pirate activity... dark corporation… dubiously quiet… engage someone to dig up the dirt."

That person is Magnus Tide, fighter pilot. His mission: "… to survive." **Edge** suspects that the missions will actually be much more rigid than that, thanks largely to *Yager*'s narrative-led structure. THQ declares it's 'genre-busting'; but it looks like anything but.

Still, that's not necessarily a bad thing, and the action, while derivative, looks pleasantly frantic. Ships have two modes of control. In the standard setting, the crafts handle like a fighter plane, but in hover mode the controls switch to allow strafing. Stealth and caution will pay dividends; the game appears to want to play like a firstperson shooter in the sky, more *Descent* than *Rogue Leader*. Changes of pace are in evidence, too: some missions will require the player to take their place in the gunner's seat, providing an on-rails shoot 'em up ride through the vast levels. And, if the thrill of combat wasn't incentive enough, your performance in missions affects your relationship with your lieutenant, steely ice-maiden Sarah.

Worryingly, though, there doesn't seem to be anything in place apart from a spectacular game shell. The game mechanics on show appeared to be placeholder, the lack of any appreciable collision detection in the code lent a ghostly, washed-out feeling to the demonstration, and the developers reluctance to let **Edge** anywhere near the controller implies a greater fragility than THQ might want. A feature list that reads like an instruction manual for creating a competent, uninspiring shooter also proves disheartening, but perhaps **Edge** is being overly pessimistic. There's not long left on the development cycle, but if Yager Team can come up with a game to match the visuals, *Yager* could still end up being beautiful.



Multiplayer combat will be only available on the PC version, a disappointment for those seeking to take advantage of the Xbox's network capabilities



Detailed ship textures give the *Yager* universe a worn-down feel, more 'Star Wars' than 'Star Trek'





A firstperson cockpit view is available, as is the now obligatory zoom/sniper mode. There's no pretence to realism here though. *Yager* is a clean and simple arcade shooter

GunValkyrie

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Sega (distributed by Infogrames)
Developer: Smilebit
Origin: Japan
Release: Out now (Japan/US), May 2 (UK)

Previously in E100, E105

Inspired by the anarchic 'Starship Troopers', Smilebit's latest opus offers gamers the chance to smash and rend thousands of insects with ridiculously high-powered weapons



Edge has already championed Smilebit's fascinating insect splattering game in two previous issues, but the emergence of a two-level playable demo necessitated another report. And the news is all good. While **Edge** certainly has something of a penchant for games containing mechanised warriors of destruction, *GunValkyrie* is rather special. True, it's a bit of a no-brainer with the focus resting firmly on frenzied firepower and ridiculous pyrotechnics but the game delivers gratifying action throughout.

Moving your hero around is at first a little cumbersome – partly because there is no strafe command – but it soon becomes very intuitive. While the left analogue stick moves you backwards and forwards – with rotation from left to right – the right stick controls a smoothly implemented camera. The left trigger controls boost, while the right trigger fires the selected weapon.

Once enough Halley Cores are collected multiple aliens can be targeted for enhanced destruction

The most striking aspect of the game is the satisfying manner in which the enemy insects explode when hit. It's a vivid effect which results in flying fragments of carapace followed by copious amounts of goo. Target several of the alien beasts at once and the screen can disappear in a wash of green. Of course, there are several types of creature to contend with and once the screen begins to fill with teeming hordes the action becomes very reminiscent of Paul Verhoeven's enjoyable splatterfest, 'Starship Troopers'.

Although the action soon becomes frantic there are enough nuances to keep the game from repetition. Occasionally creatures leave Halley Cores (balls of energy) which must be collected to complete the level. But shoot enough enemies and they leave power-ups to bolster defences and increase abilities. The new capabilities then make your warrior more mobile and aggressive. Evolution of the exoskeleton eventually produces lateral rolls and enhanced forward propulsion. Once these techniques are used in conjunction with powerful weaponry the sense of empowerment becomes even more marked.

Like *Jet Set Radio Future*, Smilebit's *GunValkyrie* is unlikely to shift huge numbers, but Xbox gamers searching for unremitting action need look no further.





The architecture is glorious and the draw distance of the outer-world areas gives a glimpse at a visually uninhibited future. There's no fog and alien suns glint beautifully off surfaces. However, the number of enemies onscreen prevents too much sightseeing





The boost function only lasts for a short period but gives an extra dimension to the thirdperson shooting

Tekki

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Summer (Japan)**

Concerns over the size of Xbox fade in comparison to the mammoth sized peripheral for Capcom's hardcore mech simulation title

If there's a single title that encapsulates and embodies the Japanese love affair for big, bipedal robots, *Tekki* could be it. Taking the distinctively intricate control schemes of titles such as *Virtual On* and *Armored Core* to their logical conclusion, it requires a custom-built, 50-button, peripheral that seems to make a mockery of concerns regarding the size of the regular Xbox controller. But even taking into account the techno fetishist appeal of the controller and the Japanese mech obsession, Capcom is taking a significant gamble on the commercial success of Xbox – particularly given the prohibitive cost of the unit.

Conceived by Hifumi Kohno and *Biohazard* creator Shinji Mikami, *Tekki* is an indication of the sort of flight of fancy that might be expected from Capcom now that the *Biohazard* series seems to have run its course on PlayStation2. The title, *Tekki*, is a derivation from two kanji: 'tetsu', meaning 'iron' or 'steel', and 'ki', which means 'knight'. So literally, 'Iron Knight', which, in addition to being slightly more appropriate than previous name, *Brainbox*, is a fairly accurate summary of the game's subject matter.

The enormous peripheral, which weighs in at an impressive three times the size of the Xbox itself, incorporates buttons, joysticks, switches and pedals – and even includes an ejection button which is shielded to prevent accidental use. Meanwhile, the onscreen display consists of a dashboard display, HUD and viewing screen. Together, they combine to conjure an impressive simulation of the interior of a mech cockpit, adding a visceral thrill to the destruction of enemies and buildings, and producing a sophisticated, if complicated, control scheme.

Structurally, the game consists of a series of missions that take place in a single, huge city against an assortment of different enemies, ranging from other VTs, through to tanks and infantry, and even aerial forces. Different kinds of targets are susceptible to different types of weapons, requiring quick tactical thinking, as well as manual dexterity.

A nice touch, in keeping with the game's simulation tone, is that damage to your VT precipitates a gradual breakdown of the mech's functions, culminating in a loss of visual display – although interestingly it is still possible to carry on playing using radar alone to navigate.

Currently estimated to be about 40 per cent complete, it remains unclear as to whether *Tekki* will be graced with a PAL release. Compared to their Japanese counterparts, western gamers have demonstrated a reluctance to embrace the convoluted controls and peripherals of previous mech titles. But given **Edge**'s own fascination with big robots, it would be a shame to see it restricted to Japan.













Western gamers haven't historically been too fond of the sort of complicated control scheme that *Tekki* employs, but there has to be a first time for everything, and judging by these screenshots, this could be it



As these screenshots and pictures of the massive control peripheral demonstrate, the emphasis in *Tekki* is firmly on simulation, rather than immediate arcade action, with the onscreen display and input mechanism combining to produce instinctive results. A limited PAL release remains a possibility

Twin Caliber

Format: PS2, Xbo
Publisher: Rag
Developer: In-hous
Origin: U
Release: Wint

An abandoned village full of undead monstrosities is hardly the most original setting for a videogame, but a novel two-weapon aiming system promises something very special





The singlescreen cooperative mode promises to deliver some tense action. But it's still uncertain if damage from friendly fire will be included

Poor old John Woo. Little did he know that when he perfected the art of filming men firing guns from the most compromising positions – rolling under mortuary tables, jumping over horses, even standing atop the wings of airplanes – that his name would become synonymous with any kind of action. Now press releases from even the blandest flight sim come with lavish promises of 'John Woo-style' entertainment.

Twin Caliber is the latest game that attempts to capture the spirit of Hong Kong's most famous movie director. At least it shows some promise. The game's USP is that the main character's movement is controlled from a traditional thirdperson perspective, but each of the gun arms becomes independently assigned to an analogue stick (presumably) when the shoulder buttons are pressed. This could, of course, result in less than cool Magnus Pike-style gesticulations, but it's hoped that clever targeting will prevent arms from flailing around too wildly.

An interesting cooperative mode (with both characters onscreen at the same time) sees the unlikely partnership of a sheriff and a prisoner taking on an abandoned town overrun by an evil cult. Early shots certainly auger well for a title trying to do something a little different.



Graphically, the game is hardly pushing the envelope, but early footage suggests that *Twin Caliber* contains the kind of gunplay seen in Rodriguez's 'From Dusk Till Dawn'. It's certainly refreshing to see Rage trying something new

Shadowbane

Format: PC/Ma
Publisher: Swing! Entertainme
Developer: Wolfpack Studi
Origin: U
Release: May

Ambitious German publisher enters the massively multiplayer RPG fray, hoping to take on big boys such as Everquest

The number of MMORPGs announced recently suggests that videogame publishers know something that we don't. Perhaps there's some sort of MMORPG equivalent to Moore's Law, stating that the number of sustainable MMORPGs is set to double every 18 months. Or something like that. But into this maelstrom of competition marches Swing! Entertainment, an ambitious German publisher that has devoted considerable effort to setting up a separate company specifically to provide ongoing support for *Shadowbane*.

Unsurprisingly, it's a title that's broadly comparable to *Everquest*, featuring a familiar set of AD&D-inspired selection of statistics, character classes and races. One of the aspects that Swing! hopes will distinguish it from similar titles is a more laissez-faire approach to the management of in-game communities and activities. Thus the game acquires a fairly significant strategic hue, with players able to build up communities and kingdoms, and take part in the consequent conflicts and conquests.

Shadowbane also features a 'timer-based' combat system to maintain a balance between players with different connection speeds, and each cluster of servers will feature a unique part of the game universe. A monthly subscription should cost around €12.



When it comes to MMORPGs, a lot comes down to the quality of the playing community, the technical efficiency of the game servers, and the ongoing moderation by the game's creators. But *Shadowbane*'s mechanics are solid and attractive





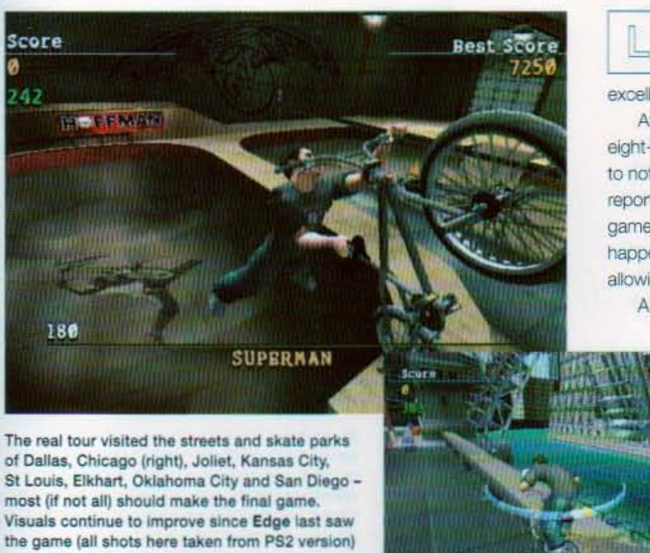
Despite broad similarities to *Everquest*, it's actually much more strategic, with formal diplomacy likely to be more pronounced

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GBA**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Rainbow Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **June**

Previously in **E**106

In an interesting move, Activision's second bicycle motocross videogame follows a real life BMX tour undertaken by Mat and friends specifically for the game



The real tour visited the streets and skate parks of Dallas, Chicago (right), Joliet, Kansas City, St Louis, Elkhart, Oklahoma City and San Diego – most (if not all) should make the final game. Visuals continue to improve since Edge last saw the game (all shots here taken from PS2 version)

Latest code would appear to suggest that Rainbow Studios is on course to do a considerably better job of bringing the new *Hoffman's* game in line with the quality displayed by the excellent *Hawk* titles than prequel developer Runecraft.

Attempting to bolster the title's individuality, Activision planned an eight-city BMX road trip around the US for Hoffman and his entourage to not only obtain footage for the game (conveniently, a full-length reportage is also planned for broadcast on ESPN), but also provide the game with its structure. As such, the game's main mode mirrors real life happenings and hopes to further engross players in the virtual events by allowing you free movement within the vast environments.

A course editor allows custom tracks to be built and, if you're an Xbox owner, these can then be swapped online with fellow gamers. (Other Xbox exclusive features include the ability to download an extra level and character within three months following launch.)

With the BMX sub-genre becoming as crowded as, say, the F1 game category, it's somewhat reassuring to see a developer such as Rainbow Studios actively trying to differentiate its creation. Besides, unlike skateboarding, the BMX videogaming crown is still up for grabs.





The flatland tricks (the first for a BMX title) are really well implemented. The collision detection remains unfinished but signs are rather positive

Phantom Crash



Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Phantagram**
Developer: **Genki**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3**

Microsoft does its bit for global unity as Korea and Japan unite to release another mech-based blast 'em up for Xbox





Early video footage suggests that the game's main tactical idiosyncracy is sheer fluidity and speed, and the use of cloaking devices



Post apocalyptic ruins form the backdrop to combat encounters, with the B-movie plot suggesting that Tokyo has been destroyed

Not so long ago it would have been unthinkable for a Korean publisher to release a Japanese-developed game for an American console. In that respect, *Phantom Crash* is a sign of the times: Microsoft's entry into the home console market has made it difficult for Japanese manufacturers to lock out Korean publishers and developers, despite cultural import barriers between the two countries. Korean publisher Phantagram is one of the first companies to benefit, developing titles internally as well as snapping up externally developed titles such as Genki's mech-based shoot 'em up, *Phantom Crash*.

The backstory is hardly original, boasting fairly familiar dystopian themes and setting the action in post-industrial wastelands that have been given over to gladiatorial combat bouts between 'Scoobees' (piloted mechs). However, early preview footage suggests that the action is fast and fluid, and environments and character models finely detailed and well designed.

And although it's not too clear at the moment what will set it apart from other mech titles, such as *Tekki* (see p39) and *J-Phoenix*, the inclusion of a Predator-like cloaking device threatens to add some spice to the combat mix, and players can customise the configuration and colour schemes of their Scoobees.

Downforce

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Titus
Developer: Smart Dog
Origin: UK
Release: May

Ignore grooved tyres, downforce restrictions, pit lane overtaking and slow circuits – it turns out the future of Formula One isn't boring after all





Crashes are some of the more spectacular seen in videogame form. Twoplayer mode is impressive

Downforce features a futuristic racing league that has broken away from the sport's governing body. In it, 14 modified F1 cars (extra wings, air brakes, jet engines, etc) compete on 21 circuits from eight global locations (Singapore, Tokyo, Las Vegas, Florida, Hong Kong airport, Sydney, Geneva and Toronto).

Crucially, the sense of speed is good and the layout of the various circuits **Edge** has tried encourage high-velocity racing. This inevitably leads to accidents which Smart Dog has worked hard to get right and they're easily the game's most appealing aspect: upon contact , vehicles smash into a fiery shower of fibreglass with impressive ferocity – it's exaggerated, naturally, and all the better for it (à la *Daytona*, it's straight back into the action once the crash is over). Good, too, is the handling which prefers simplicity over realism, even if it's not the most elaborate system and can perhaps feel a little too digital at times.

But, if there is a valid criticism, it's the lack of cars on the circuit. Only ten make the grid and as the field spreads out it's possible to spend far too much time on your own. While this could be down to the difficulty level used in the preview code, either a higher number of vehicles or an artificial catch-up option would make things far more hectic and massively improve matters.



Seven play modes are offered, including fun options such as Crash Arena where the idea is to score as many points as possible from the wildest accidents your fingers can come up with. Now, if only the developer convinces the CPU to display a few more cars on the circuits...

Zettai Zetsumei Toshi (City of Desperation)

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Irem
Developer: InterOne Inc.
Origin: Japan
Release: Spring (Japan), TBC (UK)

Set against a cityscape rocked to its foundations, Irem's PS2 actioner looks set to deliver survival horror adventure gaming freed of its zombie shackles

Mention 'survival' in reference to contemporary videogames and plasma-slurping zombies come to mind, set against sombre, eerily lit backdrops. But *City of Desperation* gives the genre a spin: survival remains key to the experience, but it's an earthquake, not the shuffling undead, that threatens your demise at every turn.

The action kicks off following the quake itself, and you're faced with the task of making your way from a partially ruined suspension bridge to the relative safety of the mainland. Further, smaller tremors occur at scripted intervals, forcing masonry to rain upon your head, the ground to give way, and even abandoned vehicles to come into play.

The game is an urbanised hybrid of *Extermination* and *Resident Evil*, the sharp graphical style of the former lending a sophisticated air to the search/puzzle/explore dynamic of Capcom's title. Aggression is conspicuous by its absence, however, giving the gaming sensation a tangibly original air.

Among numerous set pieces reminiscent of '70s disaster flicks, several NPCs rear their heads. Rescuing these – an especially dangerous undertaking – is an obvious goal, and a rewarding one.

Overall, *City of Desperation* looks like ample evidence that innovation on PS2 is alive and kicking – in Japan, at least.



Further tremors follow the initial quake: though you can often see cracks in the architecture around you, it's still possible to be caught unawares (above). Falling doesn't always result in death, though – if you're quick enough (left)





The partially ruined nature of the environments means that you'll be charged with navigating some particularly awkward structures

Bruce Lee: Quest of the Dragon

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **Ronin Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q3**

A quality scrolling 3D beat 'em up has eluded the world's best game designers, so it's with some hope that Edge views the latest title to attempt such a feat





Special dragon coins can be picked up to give Lee a flaming fist attack at double speed. Unfortunately, clumsy controls don't auger well

A *Streets of Rage*-style beat 'em up done in a 3D scrolling environment with intricate combos and fluid movement has so far eluded designers. *Fighting Force* and *The Bouncer* certainly didn't deliver on early promises. The closest example – in terms of pure mechanics – came in Bungie's delightful fusion of anime and sci-fi, *Oni*.

Bruce Lee is the latest title to move the beat 'em up from the 2D to the 3D arena. Such a rich licence – not to mention heritage with the excellent C64 and Spectrum versions – could have initiated a new era for the scrolling beat 'em up. Sadly it's not going to happen with this title. While it's still too early to be absolutely sure of the game's final quality, a dodgy camera, awkward controls and poor collision detection indicate a title more in spirit with Bruce Forsyth than Bruce Lee.

Some 130 moves are expected to make the final cut and players can upgrade skills by collecting coins along the way. Reaching key locations provokes time battles, either with a boss or several henchmen. Branching routes also add some variety to the game, but it's questionable whether players will be prepared to go through the game more than once. Unfortunately there's no ignoring the fact that the grace and elegance of the world's most revered martial artist has not been captured in the fighting sequences.



Some fight sequences will mimic those in Lee's more famous films, such as 'The Big Boss'. Fans will even get the opportunity to deliver blows with nunchucka and a staff on later levels

The Thing

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **Computer Artworks**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q3**

Previously in **E**102

At last, a game emerges with a unique aspect fuelling its core gameplay, but will the elements of trust and fear be used to good effect, or merely complicate and frustrate?

Forget the exploration of an arctic outpost, malformed DNA freak-monsters or the thirdperson shooting – that's the stuff of cliché. *The Thing*'s long-term success will depend on how the elements of trust and fear are implemented into the game.

In essence the player must gain the confidence of AI-controlled colleagues. A menu displays the members of your team complete with appropriate facial expressions. Should a compatriot's fear meter get dangerously high his paranoia may become so intense that he will turn and shoot you. But keeping allies sweet is important for other reasons – certain doors and areas can only be opened by authorised personnel. NPCs that decline can be threatened with a gun to the head, but after the task has been performed the trust meter will rise dramatically. Just how such elements will hang together during the entirety of the game remain to be seen.

Unfortunately, playable code suggests that targeting is sloppy, movement clumsy and the AI rudimentary. Certain guns, machinery and switches can be operated, which sends the game into firstperson view, but often the effect is awkward. However, the game does have atmosphere in abundance and the anxiety provoked by meeting humans who can potentially mutate at any moment is potentially nerve-wracking.



The environments are suitably creepy and the game oozes atmosphere. The lighting is impressive with weapons like the flame thrower (above) picking out details from the surroundings





A good deal of tension is built up in the game because the player never fully knows if colleagues are going to turn into evil aberrations



Enclave

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Swing! Entertainment**
Developer: **Starbreeze Studios**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **May 31**

Previously in **E**98

A Swedish developer sets out after the Holy Grail of swords and sorcery gaming: how to develop a thirdperson slash 'em up that plays as well as it looks



Enclave is a brilliant advert for the significant graphical scope of Xbox. Whether it will ever be more than that, though, remains to be seen. However, there's still time to hone the finer points of the control interface and game mechanics

Since **Edge** first looked at it, *Enclave* has continued to impress visually. But after the unfortunate precedent set by the likes of *Rune* and *Severance*, Swedish developer Starbreeze Studios now has its work cut out making sure that it doesn't deliver just another graphically appealing hack 'n' slash 'em up that ultimately fails to deliver fulfilling gameplay.

Judging by recent appearances there's still plenty of work to do on the control interface which remains slightly twitchy and lacking in subtlety, for example, and sadly it looks like the coin pick-ups are set to stay – despite the fact that they sit uneasily next to the super realistic environments and character models.

However, the prospect of multiplayer combat on an epic scale with battlefields that feature massive engines of war is still an enticing one. In addition, there's the fact that character classes are specialised, with each one requiring a distinct tactical approach. They can also be customised over the course of the singleplayer game with new weapons and armour, and a hub-like structure that adds a modicum of strategic choice to the order in which missions are undertaken. And, owing to sophisticated level of detail and atmospheric lighting effects, it clearly looks nice. But will that be enough?





Players can choose from a range of characters, each of which requires a distinct tactical approach to get the most out of their unique skills

Tour de France

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **June**

No engines, no tricks, and definitely no nandrolone power-ups, Konami's new Gallic licence combines arcade simplicity with the thrill of bicycles and aerodynamic lycra





Using the slipstream created by opponents is vital. Its size and position is determined by the the rider in front and the direction of the wind



The energy bar in the bottom left-hand corner can be replenished by drinking a bottle of water, but only on five seperate occasions. Using it wisely is important, particularly since **Edge**'s preview code appears to be exceptionally difficult

It's not a game that **Edge** would expect much of, and the simplistic dynamic seems like it might back up the 'licence first, game second' preconceptions. Pressing the x button causes your cyclist to pedal, so frantic bashing makes him go faster, but also expends energy. Overtaking rivals must be done by combining judicious use of the current incline with your rival's slipstream and well timed bursts of speed. *Tour de France* sounds tedious, but there's something compelling about it, and it's relaxing too.

So, Arcade mode provides the quick fix, while Tour de France is the game's centrepiece – a career mode which offers gamers the chance to build up the skills of a novice cyclist and turn them into a Miguel Indurain beater. The obligatory twoplayer race-off and time trial settings make up the remainder of the competitive game, while those who see cycling as a leisurely pursuit can learn to race via the Practice mode. In other words, it has all the options you'd expect of a big-name racer, without any of the engine noise.



Perhaps that serenity is what makes *Tour de France* so pleasant, or maybe it's the rhythmic nature of the control system, which ties in perfectly with the subject matter. Either way, it's a much cuter game than **Edge** gave the concept credit for.

Barbarian

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Titus
Developer: Saffire
Origin: US
Release: May

Previously in E106

The arrival of playable code of Saffire's spiritual successor to the classic 8bit gorefest shows significant scope to become a sophisticated brawler



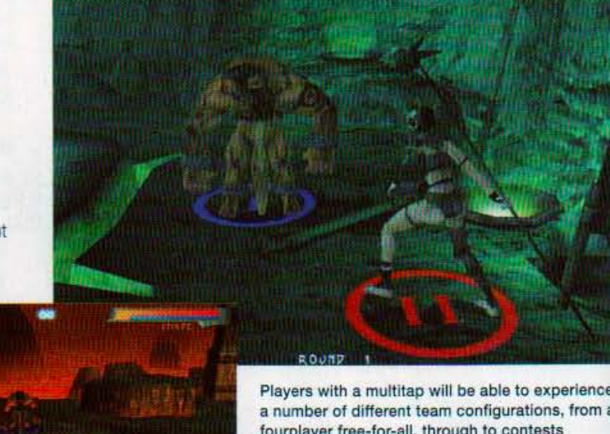


It doesn't have the vividly charming aesthetic of the *PowerStone* series, but *Barbarian* does have a sizeable number of detailed interactive arenas

Although some work needs to be done on the AI, the delivery of a playable preview version of *Barbarian* has given **Edge** the opportunity to get a closer look at the game's combat mechanics. And while it's too early to say whether the various components will gel entirely successfully, it does display considerable potential. Free roaming, interactive arenas combine with a dynamic quest structure, for example, and experience points can be used to customise characters over the course of the singleplayer game.

The most interesting feature though, is the combinatorial special attack structure. Performing combos, destroying objects in the arena, countering an attack, or throwing an opponent each power up different types of runes, which can then be used to initiate a certain type of magical attack. Combos themselves are also well conceived, with each combo producing a different effect, from juggling an opponent in the air to securing a quick knockdown.

Layered on top of the interactive arenas, and factoring in the supported four players (plus AI-controlled automatons), it could be the key to the game's success if implemented well. Although *Barbarian* will initially appear on PlayStation2, enhanced Xbox and GameCube versions are also in development.



Players with a multitap will be able to experience a number of different team configurations, from a fourplayer free-for-all, through to contests between teams made up of two players apiece

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

Format: PC, Xbox
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: BioWare
Origin: US
Release: Autumn

A return to the halcyon days of the Jedi order? Certainly. A return to the halcyon days of LucasArts? Probably

Given BioWare's track record, it's inconceivable that LucasArts could have found a developer more likely to do justice to an RPG based in the 'Star Wars' universe. Set 4,000 years prior to 'The Phantom Menace', *Knights of the Old Republic* eschews the isometric viewpoint of *Baldur's Gate*, replacing it with sumptuous 3D visuals courtesy of a custom built engine, and introduces a new interface, which is optimised for either Xbox or PC. A new combat system places greater emphasis on action than the *Baldur's Gate* titles, and a series of minigames, such as *Swoop Bike* racing, is included.

Players are able to create parties of up to three characters, drawn from a variety of races and character classes – such as Scoundrel, Bounty Hunter, and Jedi Guardian – and the action ranges from Tatooine to the Jedi Academy on Dantooine and the Wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk.

Significantly though, BioWare is promising that all the narrative hallmarks of the company's previous RPGs will be implemented in the 'Star Wars' universe. Throw in a dynamic alignment system to mimic the interplay between the dark and light sides of the Force, and *Knights of the Old Republic* should provide *Star Wars Galaxies* with some serious competition.

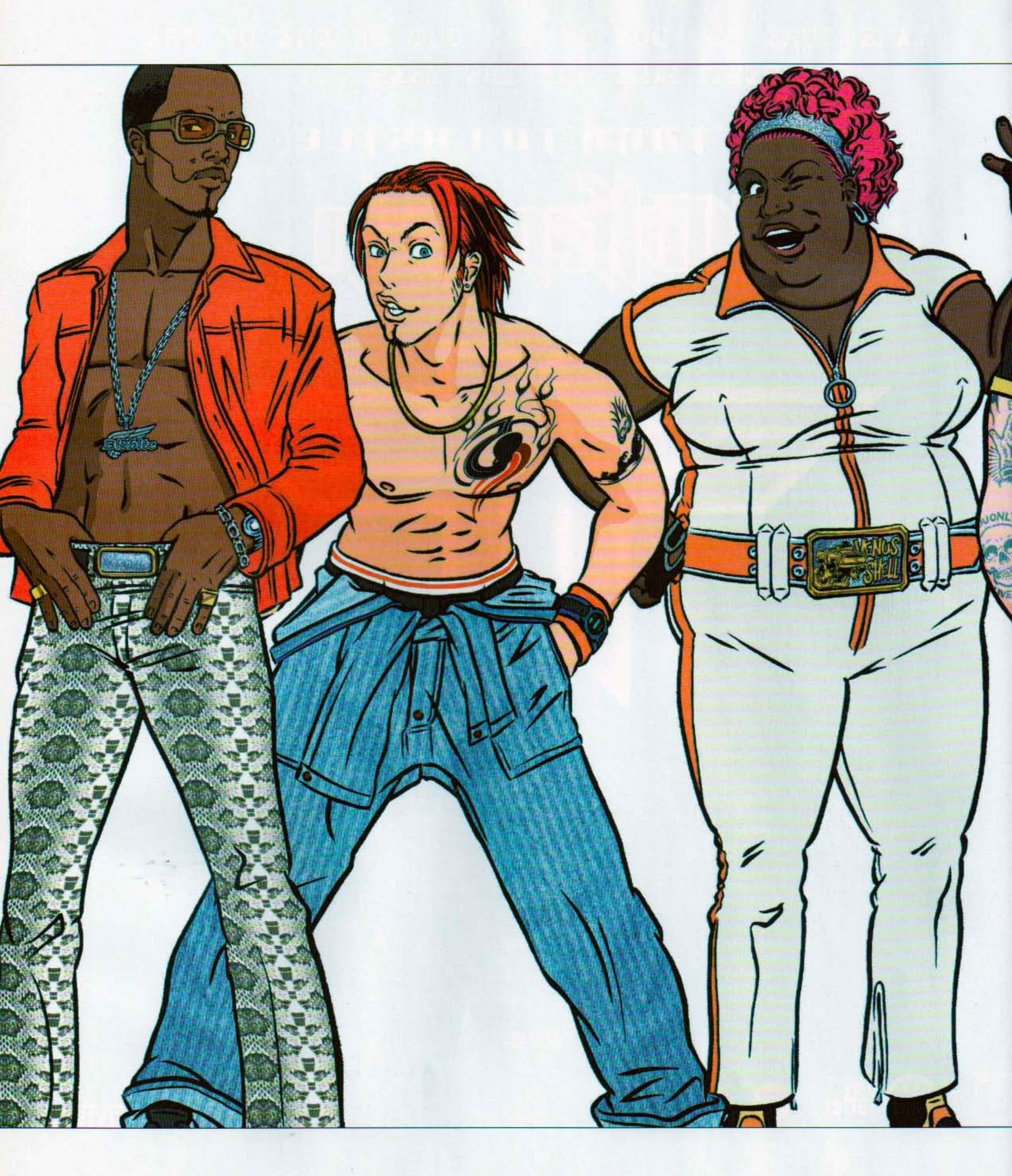


Though these screenshots demonstrate BioWare's incredible new 3D graphics engine, the company's track record on titles such as *Baldur's Gate*, would suggest that there's a strong likelihood the game mechanics and narrative will match the visuals





By setting the game in a period well before the movies, players are granted the freedom to indulge their wildest Jedi knight fantasies


Bizbite
VENUS SHELL



Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller

A forced format switch – Xbox in, Dreamcast gone – turns Crazy Taxi's trademark bright blue skies dark. Could this signal a subdued, late-night simulation feel for the third in Sega's ex-arcade franchise? Are you crazy?

When Sega confirmed its intention to move to software-only status last year, **Edge**'s cover celebrated its move from hardware failure to publishing giant. The Dreamcast was mourned, but Sega was celebrated as the people's champion, arriving from nowhere to challenge EA's iterative publishing policies with new, vibrant videogames. **Edge**'s first cover after the big announcement? *Crazy Taxi 2*. A year later, and producer of the inevitable *Crazy Taxi 3*, **Kenji Kanno**, meets **Edge** at Sega's department in Higashikojiya, Tokyo, to dispel thoughts of EA-style annual updates, and to discuss *High Roller*'s new features.

Kanno-san's first words: "I would not say there are any new features in this sequel."

Ah.

"At least not like what we added in *Crazy Taxi 2*," he continues. "We were not all satisfied with the second version. I felt we just added the jump feature and that was all, and I really believed that, with more time, we could have developed the idea in detail, made it more enjoyable. So, while I understand that introducing new features makes sequels great, for *Crazy Taxi 3* making the jump fully enjoyable was a priority – and, in a sense, something new."

Right. Not just an update, then?

"Well, we didn't want to displease fans of the series, so we didn't make too many changes, I mean too many big changes. They must feel the same fun they enjoyed in previous versions.

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Hitmaker**
Release: **Summer**
Origin: **Japan**





A trip to the space shuttle with what appear to be humanoid rabbits implies that, this time, *Crazy Taxi*'s craziness involves more than manic driving

If you look at the game from a distance, you won't notice much difference. If you play it, you should be able to notice the evolution."

Image conscious

Work began on *Crazy Taxi 3* immediately after work on the previous version had finished, with a team predominantly composed of the same people ("Actually," Kannno-san adds, "It's a bigger team, about one and a half times the size of the previous one."). Since *CT2* was a Dreamcast project, the first step was to choose a system to work on.

"We wanted to try a new platform, and there were two options, GameCube and Xbox. Looking closely at both consoles, it was clear that Xbox had the most suitable image. Of course, there were

Photography: Hiroki Izumi

Kenji Kanno
producer

certainly some concerns, since this was American hardware and previous American consoles were not very successful. But you know, if you refuse to try anything new because you are afraid of something, you never make any great things."

Second step: finding your feet. "When you start working on totally new hardware, first you have to understand what it is possible to do, and in our case, we worked on the graphics to get an idea of what we would be able to deliver." But it wasn't simple.

"I know Microsoft is always telling people it is very easy to work on Xbox. Hmmm… I don't know what to think when I hear or read such things. I'd say that Sega is very different from any other thirdparties. We used to have our own platforms to develop on so when we had a problem, it was very easy to get the answer from the hardware R&D department. For the first time, we understood what it was to be a thirdparty. It's not easy."

He pauses, and rephrases. "I don't think it is that easy to work on Xbox, not at all. We want to deliver something great so we try to get most of the hardware. It's not so different to any other console. There are no especially easy or particularly hard points."

So, was it purely a matter of choosing a platform, then? Was there always going to be a sequel? Does this imply that Sega wasn't happy with the last version of *Crazy Taxi*, or does it simply recognise a valuable franchise when it makes one?

"Hmmm… each time I try to deliver the best *Crazy Taxi* and I think we've included everything we could come up with. And then we come up with a sequel. *Crazy Taxi 2* was not a bad game at all, no…"

The sentence trails off. Here comes the 'but'.

"At the same time, we had to rethink what was so crazy about *Crazy Taxi*. So we've worked hard on our game design to get the fun craziness once again, and this time to combine it properly with the jump feature. We've also increased the size of the game, especially the mini-games, as they were very much appreciated by users in *Crazy Taxi 2*. And we've introduced four new characters, as we did last time."

Fine tuning

Plenty of time for fine tuning the craziness, then, because whatever Kanno-san says about the difficulties of working with the Xbox, the transfer from DC can't have been that painful.

"Well, we've not made *everything* from scratch. We've imported many things from the previous versions and optimised them. But even if many things on the Dreamcast and Windows are close, they're still based around two very different technologies. When you jump on Xbox, which is far more powerful, you have to rebuild a lot of the game. Graphically, we used what we could, and changed everything when Xbox could offer a greater level of quality."

Aside from graphical improvements, is there much the team has been able to implement on the Xbox that it couldn't in previous versions of the franchise?

"No, it is very much the same. The game modes will be the same as they were previously. It won't be online compatible, and as for the hard drive, we use that to give us more options. For example, in the previous *Crazy Taxi*, you were able to save a restricted replay; now you can enjoy a longer replay."

A longer replay. Not so much evolution there, then, although it's worth

"The Xbox is refreshing in terms of image; it suits the crazy aspect of Crazy Taxi 3 quite well, which is why we decided to make the game on this console"



As the subtitle 'High Roller' implies, *Crazy Taxi 3*'s vehicles' suspensions will take as much punishment as they did in the previous two versions



While the Crazy Jump isn't a new feature, Kanno-san hopes to use it to better effect this time, without unbalancing the game's instinctive controls

remembering that such things are considered far less peripheral in Japan. Still, it's probably not likely to convince westerners that *CT3*'s taking full advantage of the Xbox hardware. Kanno-san questions the possibility of a simultaneous release but states that he intends to release the game on Xbox in all three markets during this summer. Where will *Crazy Taxi 3* take gamers that they've not been able to go before?

"Las Vegas," deadpans Kanno-san, referring to *Crazy Taxi 3*'s Glitter Oasis centrepiece. "However, this won't be the only area you're able to drive. Until now we had a single city and two different courses within it. That doesn't offer much difference in term of gameplay. This time, we've take a city inspired by Las Vegas as the centre of the game but you'll also able to experience a different environment. However, I can't tell you much about this yet. Anyway, until now, you had only a blue sunny sky in *Crazy Taxi*. This time, you can drive by night."

And that's substantially more revolutionary than bigger replays, given *Crazy Taxi*'s pervasive blue/yellow signature.

"I mean we had this stark blue sky in the first two versions, so making such a change was difficult. I wasn't sure this would give a good image for a taxi game, but at the same time, I wanted to offer a new image for the third version. The designers wanted to take advantage of the new hardware, so, the two approaches met and we produced this environment. They've done a terrific job using what the Xbox offers them in term of technical features for night-time. We have been able to do some very impressive effects. I think this takes the game to new levels of achievement, visually."

Perfect harmony

But not necessarily to new levels of entertainment. As wonderful as *Crazy Taxi*'s core gameplay is, *High Roller* doesn't appear to be a step forward, more consolidation in the face of pale imitators like EA's *Simpson's Road Rage*.

"I mean we had to adapt," says Kanno-san. "And we searched for more ideas in order to keep the game enjoyable, fun and cool. But in the end, it's all about balance: as you enhance one thing, you have to keep the harmony between everything else."

True. There's still plenty of time left before summer to find that perfect harmony. And after that?

"I have no idea. I mean, I don't mind. Time will tell. I think Xbox will do well. PS2 is still the main platform, but the Xbox is refreshing in terms of image: it suits the crazy aspect of *Crazy Taxi 3* quite well, which is why we decided to make the game on this console. In the same way we'll consider our next project and evaluate which platform will fit it the best. It could be another taxi game, or it could be something totally new. I don't know yet."

See you in a year, then.













As expected, four new drivers make up *Crazy Taxi 3*'s cast. The soundtrack, a key part of the original's success, has yet to be finalised, though fans of skate punk are unlikely to drive away disappointed


D

Learning curve

Is the academic community finally accepting videogames?

Videogames are currently the easiest target for the moral police. Rock 'n' roll hasn't threatened anyone for years so videogaming is now perhaps the only modern adult pastime that is still occasionally misunderstood. Still, perhaps it's better to be misunderstood than ignored. In the 40 years since *Space War* appeared on MIT's PDP-1 mainframe in 1962 (arguably the first computer game), the arbiters of intellectual acceptance – the academics – have consistently given games the cold shoulder. Until now.

In March 2001, the Information Technology University in Copenhagen hosted the first international scholarly conference on computer games, swiftly followed in July by Bristol University's 'Game Cultures' (See News, E101). That month also saw the launch of 'Games Studies', the first academic journal dedicated to computer game research. **Espen Aarseth**, 'Games Studies' editor-in-chief and associate professor in Humanistic Informatics at the University of Bergen, recently labelled 2001 'Year One' in the academic study of computer games. But why has it taken so long for games to be considered worthy of intelligent study?

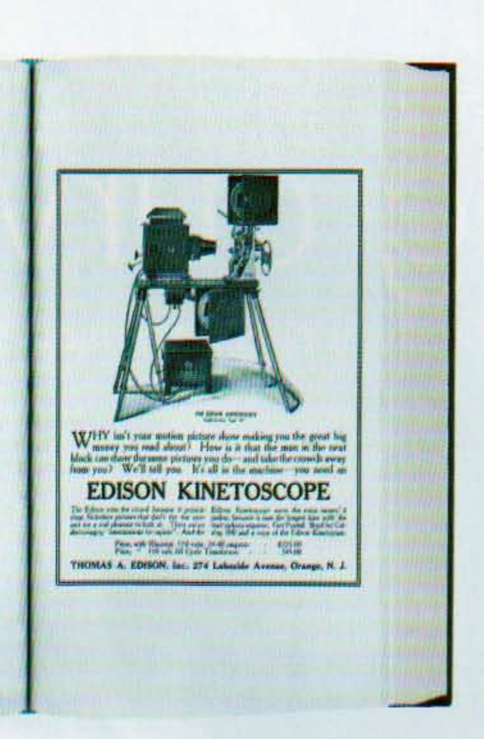
The delay is partly down to the generation gap. Professor **Henry Jenkins**, director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, sees a divide within the academic study of games "between younger scholars who grew up with games, and older scholars who came to games through the filter of other media." Jenkins, an elder statesman of computer game theory, confesses to having come across videogames indirectly, through his son. "I had played *Pong* and Atari when I was a teenager but I hadn't really paid attention to games... until my son wanted a Nintendo system for Christmas. I found myself astonished by the extraordinary leaps forward represented by Shigeru Miyamoto's *Super Mario* and *Zelda* games, and was even more astonished that so little serious criticism had been written about this medium. I have been writing about games off and on ever since."

The division is still strong within the academic community. "There's a classic issue," says **Geoff King**, at the Media Studies department of Brunel University in Middlesex, "are you a real gameplayer, or are you an academic who's dabbling?" Indeed, the academic world is so insular and competition for posts so oversubscribed that the blossoming of a new field of study opens the way for individuals to branch into a field which they have little expertise in. But Henry Jenkins acknowledges that the groundbreaking academic work on computer games will be done "by the generation that can rattle off game titles the way I can rattle off movie or television titles. I am helping to prepare the way for that generation."

But the new academic limelight stems from more than just a generation of professors with blisters on their thumbs. As virtual spaces become

Critical mass

The parallels between academic attitudes to gaming and to cinema are surprising. In the late 1800s, kinetoscope parlours – arcade-like rows of coin-op cinema machines – already had a seedy image with the middle classes. The first Lumière brothers film, 'Workers leaving the Lumière factory', was shown in December 1895. Fifteen years later, 26 million people a week went to see films, but cinema was still subject to moral anxiety, and had yet to win critical acceptance. Comments made by moral-panic stricken society figures will be familiar to any videogamer. In 1920, a member of the Canadian parliament declared, "[Movies] bring disorder into the country. Thank God there is not a moving picture show in any town or village in my constituency."



central to our working lives, games are demanding attention for their cutting edge role in world-modelling and interface design. "Unlike most other computer applications," says Aarseth, "a computer game lives or dies by the effectiveness of its user interface design. A game that is not intuitive and easy to use will simply not become popular."

Although much funding has gone into research on computer applications some believe that much of it has been frittered away. It seems that there is a practical value in videogames – simply because they are focused on entertainment alone – which computer scientists and research labs would do well to remember. Dr **James Newman**, New Media lecturer at Edge Hill College, sees computer games as "the paradigm of human computer interaction." Newman was involved in

Narratologists versus the ludologists

As academia begins to get to grips with games, some key ideological fault-lines are already emerging. The major difference of opinion within academic games research is between the narratologists, who believe computer games tell stories, in a similar way to prose fiction and cinema; and the ludologists (from the Latin for 'I play'), who see the demands of computer games – motion, skill, strategy – as more like the demands of games in general, along with snooker, chess or football.

Despite (or perhaps because of) his fond memories of playing *The Hobbit* text adventure with a friend over the phone, Aarseth – who coined the term 'ludologist' – does not believe in the primacy of stories in computer gaming. "The tendency to see games as stories is

"For all the millions of dollars of SGI equipment I was being shown, none of the experiences were as compelling, none of interfaces as well designed or usable, as my £50 Game Boy"

the study of scientific applications of hi-tech total immersion VR, until he realised "for all the millions of dollars of SGI equipment I was being shown, none of the experiences were as compelling or believable, none of the interfaces as well designed or usable, as my £50 Game Boy."

an intellectual short circuit," he says, "which confuses two fairly useful but complex and orthogonal concepts: stories and games." **Jesper Juul**, lecturer in Digital Aesthetics and Communication at the University of Copenhagen, believes narrative "tends to be isolated from or even work against the computer-game-ness of the game."







Early games, such as *The Hobbit* (left) relied on narrative to propel the player along, but the advent of 3D engines gave designers more scope for exploring game space. Examining narrative is a 'dead-end' argue ludologists, it's the 'play' in titles like *Donkey Kong 64* (centre) and *Tomb Raider* (right) that counts

According to Newman, another ludologist, action – not story – makes the game. "When recounting their experiences of *Tomb Raider*, players do not talk about the 'story'. Instead, they talk about trying to escape from the wolves, running and shooting. Good games can have lousy stories," says Newman, "but there aren't too many good games with lousy controls. Narratives often do little more than attempt to justify a hackneyed gaming situation. ('Oh, so that's how I ended up in a mine cart.')"

The ludologists' position is shared by many in the industry. **Dino Dini**, *Kick Off* creator and founder of Abundant Software, agrees. "We are in the business of making games," he says, "not telling stories. The very best games are those where the story is 'written' by the player." The debate between story and gameplay is not just academic. As Dini points out, "there is a similar battle reflected in the industry, where sometimes more money is spent on the FMVs than on the game itself."

Dancing to architecture: games and other media

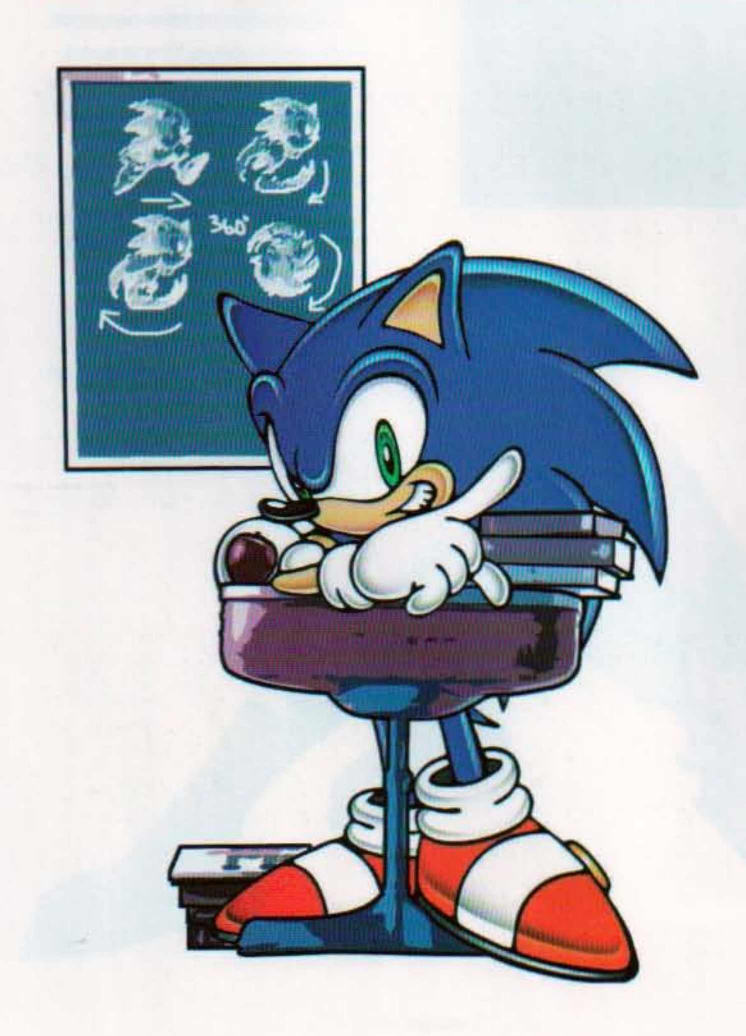
In response to the ludologists, the narratologists argue we can benefit from dialogue between games and other story-telling forms. **Gregory Smith**, at Georgia State university, points out how a new medium often "helps us realise what's distinctive about old media. Photography made artists and audiences rethink what painting is about, and game storytelling can help us rethink the conventions of visual storytelling." For too long developers have chosen to take the linear approach to narrative (admittedly, this has been largely due to financial constraints). But there is a feeling that the kind of Modernist experimentation which occurred at the turn of the 20th century in prose fiction is now beginning to happen in videogames. Titles such as *Deus Ex*, *Silent Hill 2*, *Shadow of Memories* and the forthcoming Xbox game, *Project Ego* are exploring the unique videogame space with experiences which seek to jar, surprise and generally confound our expectations of narrative form. The videogame has a unique ability to push such boundaries which are not available to other forms of media.

Of course, links between cinema and videogames will always be made – what Aarseth calls "The Nintendo-Hollywood complex." Many games use cinematic devices – viewpoints, camera angles, zooms and pans, external views of characters – to convey key elements of story. And at the very least, FMV cut-scenes point to a familial relationship with film. But even here the comparisons are not straightforward. **Tanya Krzyswinska**, a film theorist from Brunel University in Middlesex, sees cut-scenes as inherently anti-cinematic. "When you see a Hollywood





Both *Deus Ex* (left) and *Shadow of Memories* (right) borrow heavily from films, but while a movie attempts to seemlessly draw you in, cut-scenes only jar the player away from their involvement



Writers' block

Are videogames culturally relevant? Edge canvassed some opinion...

John Lahr, 'New Yorker' magazine's senior drama critic

"Computer games are very much a sign of the nihilistic times. Because they absorb the mind so completely, they are a way of not dealing at all with reality: a way of losing the self. Unlike art, or through fiction, where we are working through problems and drama, the stories in computer games don't take you on any humanising trajectory. You don't expand with them, you simply pass time. They kill time, rather than inform time, or help you deal with your time. They take you out of time. In that sense they are a form of benign drug, and an addiction. I think that they are symptomatic of the culture, but I don't see anything redeeming in them at all. I know some people feel games are a way of taking part in danger vicariously, and solving problems without having to risk experience. I suppose the answer to that is, that's the problem with them. There's nothing which has anything to do with actual experience."

Julie Burchill, author and journalist

"I love computer games, but only puzzle ones. I've got five different versions of *Tetris*, for Game Boy, Nintendo and PS2. I would say in my defence that these machines belong to my 15-year-old son. Sometimes my boyfriend and I play puzzle games for hours, for money. I often win, which is quite good as he is 29 and grew up with games. My favourite game is a Japanese one for PlayStation called *Magic Drop*, though mine isn't as good as the arcade one we used to play, where if you were very good, the goddess showed her behind and said, 'See!' They're too much fun to be art. Art's not fun, it's grief and boredom."

Will Self, writer and broadcaster

"Games don't interest me so much. I'm pre-games (remember, when I was a kid *Ping* [sic] was the dernier cri in computer games, and during adolescence it was *Space Invaders*). I did a consultancy in the early '90s for the Dutch electronics giant Philips on the potential of computer games as an entertainment medium and what I said – 'when realtime violence realistically enacted is a possibility, they'll take off big time' – has satisfyingly come to pass."

Eamonn McCabe Award-winning photographer and former picture editor of 'The Guardian'

"I used to work with computers all day, and the last thing I wanted to do come the evening was play games. I see people playing cards on the screen, but I never think, 'how does that work?' I'm not of that generation. I was worried my son would get hooked on games. But they seem to grow out of them."



(Above) The use of 'bullet-time' in titles such as *Max Payne* is a device taken directly from movie making craft, but some argue that videogames will influence the next generation of film makers. (Right) MIT's 'Games to Teach' project, headed by Professor Henry Jenkins, explores ways to use gaming technologies in Advanced Science, Engineering, and Mathematics education





movie, it's seamless and continuity editing works towards making you not notice the mechanics of the movie. When you're playing a game, and a cut-scene cuts in, it's a change in form. So it seems to me quite anti-cinematic. It disrupts the seamlessness of the game."

King and Krzywinska see games as explicitly cinematic in more oblique ways. They point out that *Max Payne*'s 'bullet-time' is a reference to John Woo and *Matrix*-style slowed-cinematic gunplay. Says King: "*Max Payne* is also sold on the basis of providing fast-paced, story-driven gameplay with cinematic cut-frame sequences more tightly integrated into the experience… each of these selling points is predicated on the assumption that, in a case such as this, 'more cinematic' equals 'better' and more distinctive gameplay."

To some extent the influences go both ways. Jenkins believes "cinema seems to be borrowing more and more from the narrative structure and visual vocabulary of games." Krzywinska and King are suspicious of the scale of this influence. "There is a lot of loose talk about games influencing films," says Krzywinska. "It's very easy to say that movies are becoming more like games. I'm deeply sceptical about that, in general." Even direct game-to-screen conversions, such as the recent 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider', seem to Krzywinska and King to actively shy away from any game-like elements – perhaps, Krzywinska surmises, out of a generic jealousy. Instead the pair find direct structural echoes of computer games in films like 'Groundhog Day' and 'Run Lola Run', where the protagonist gets repeated opportunities to prevail.

The ludologists are cautious about using existing vocabulary to theorise about the nature of computer games. "Making room for a new field usually means reducing the resources of the existing ones," says Aarseth, "and the existing fields will also often respond by trying to contain the new area as a sub-field. Games are not a kind of cinema, or literature, but colonising attempts from both these fields have already happened, and no doubt will happen again." Even those who believe there is much to learn from the comparison between games and other media are keen not to be seen to lecture on the subject. Krzywinska: "We've all got our axes to grind. And there are so many competing interests. So games studies is itself a contested space." All agree that care should be taken not to steam-roller videogames into existing categories. "We need to be careful to define the scope of our studies," says Newman, "to ensure that we are sensitively encountering videogames on their own terms."

Space and Time: Narrative Architecture

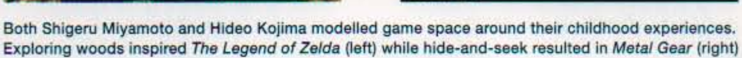
Something both the ludologists and narratologists agree on is that games are first and foremost a spatial medium. "Game designers don't simply tell stories," Jenkins argues, "they design worlds and sculpt spaces. It makes sense to think of game designers less as storytellers than as narrative architects." Krzywinska and King, whose joint book 'ScreenPlay' is published in 2002, write in the introduction, "The possibility of seeming to move 'inside' the fictional world on screen is sometimes seen as a defining

characteristic of games, especially those based recognisably on individual films, franchises or film genres."

Academics are beginning to theorise that, where traditional narrative is about the unfolding of time, computer games are about the unfolding and contesting of space. From the word go, space invaders were invading us from space, but they were also invading our space. Even in our greatly evolved notions of cyberspace, the key word remains 'space'. Jenkins: "When we refer to such influential early works as Shigeru Miyamoto's *Super Mario Bros.* as 'scroll games', we situate them alongside a much older tradition of spatial storytelling: many Japanese scroll paintings map, for example, the passing of the seasons onto an unfolding space."

Jenkins believes there is a causal link between the popularity of games and the restrictions of urban society. We no longer have access to once-common shared

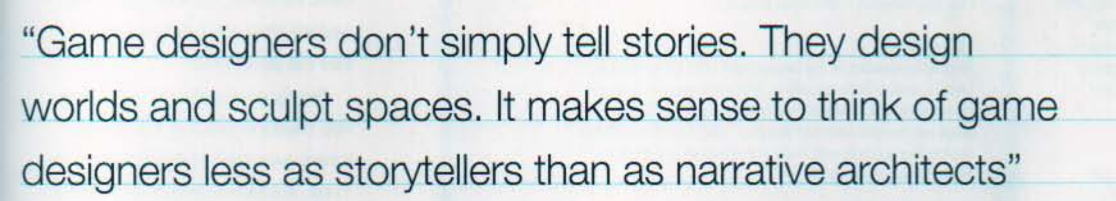




Both Shigeru Miyamoto and Hideo Kojima modelled game space around their childhood experiences. Exploring woods inspired *The Legend of Zelda* (left) while hide-and-seek resulted in *Metal Gear* (right)

this change? What can those in the thick of the games industry jungle learn from those in the ivory tower? The famously poker-mad Boston playwright David Mamet once wrote of an exchange with his father, in which Mamet Sr denounced his son for playing the game: "You're not still using cards, are you?" Mamet's father seems unforgiving – we all use games to prepare ourselves for life – but society often holds videogames in similarly unfavourable regard. I think in this time in which games are attacked by society, sympathetic academics can help provide context."

Media departments have become the first to champion videogames, but other departments are lining up to make new contributions to the discussion. **TL Taylor**, assistant professor at North Carolina State University, believes significant contributions will come from "fields of study like Sociology,



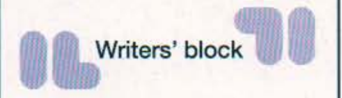
"Game designers don't simply tell stories. They design worlds and sculpt spaces. It makes sense to think of game designers less as storytellers than as narrative architects"

physical spaces, so we now explore and contest within virtual environments. "When you talk with game designers," Jenkins says, "they are often very explicit about the degree to which they model these spaces on the kinds of physical play of their boyhood." Indeed, Miyamoto-san famously modelled the *Zelda* worlds on the gardens of his youth; and Hideo Kojima explained recently how the sneak-tactics of the *Metal Gear* games stem directly from his childhood love of hide-and-seek.

What can you do for us?

Having been spurned by the establishment for so long, games don't yet care about academia as much as academia is beginning to care about games. But should Mario Land can act as a refuge, and a place to practise our skills; but to those outside them, our time in virtual worlds often seems like infantile escape. Academic approval might help promote gaming to a society sometimes mistrustful about the whole enterprise. "It is traditional in our culture to deride as trivial anything that is associated with childhood," says Newman. "This is why terms like 'game' and 'play' are so difficult for the industry to use in relation to their activity – hence 'interactive entertainment.'" Academics are in a good position to help give games credence in the eyes of society. Says Smith, "Historically speaking, popular media can become accepted as 'art' when academics take them seriously, and so Communication, English and Comparative Literature that have a long and rich intellectual tradition in dealing with issues that go right to the heart of games – theories of play, community, narrative, identity, embodiment to name only a few. We need tools to think reflectively and critically about the kinds of spaces people are inhabiting via games and we have these strong traditions to draw on."

Jon Dovey, who helped organise the Game Cultures Conference in Bristol, July 2001, was delighted with the wide range of attendant disciplines: "all kinds of academics, anthropologists, linguists, historians." This range of focused analytical opinion can only help make games richer. Jenkins: "any understanding of games



Writers' block

Mark Lawson, writer and broadcaster, presenter of 'The Late Show'

"I have played every one of the *FIFA* football games since the '97 variety: first on Sega Mega Drive, then PlayStation, now PS2. I grew up playing Subbuteo flick football and cricket, and was very sad when propriety demanded I gave them up at around the age of 18. Video and computer games can be played respectably into middle-age and beyond which is their great advantage: they are toys which have been miraculously reclassified as adult relaxation. Also – if you grew up on Subbuteo – the level of realism in sports simulation games is astonishing.

I am happy for my children to play games suitable for their age: it's good for motor skills and I think the better games stimulate the imagination. With these available, I'd never wish Subbuteo or table football on anyone now. I think for the immediately future generations, games will be as natural as cinema and television were for us."

Suzanne Moore, writer and journalist

"I played *Space Invaders* when I was young, and I haven't progressed beyond that. I'm more involved as a parent. I have girls, but girls aren't as autistic as boys: they'll play games, and then stop. One of my girls, when she was about eight, went on a Virgin flight and played games the whole time – she got games rage. Went red-eyed, refused to sleep.

I do think more and more people have the illusion of control over a physical space. They're in a fantasy world, they're killing dragons, but in actuality they're doing nothing at all. They're killing time. I am concerned about the illusion of freedom. There's the argument that we're breeding fighter pilots, but I just think we're breeding factory workers. All technology is neither radical nor conservative; it's how we use it. There's VR, but we're not using it to expand our sexuality: estate agents are using it to sell houses.

I don't know if games have had much influence on movies. There are tricks, but when you get used to those, you need scripts, character stories – games don't have those. It's action, not narrative. That's why boys love them."

Sanjeev Bhaskar

Writer, broadcaster and comedian, co-star in 'Goodness Gracious Me'

"Games have changed so much in such a short space of time, from driving and shooting right through to interactive storytelling. I own a PS2. I don't think it's unhealthy. Films, books, music, anything seen as leisure; to say it's unhealthy is kind of pointless. Are films unhealthy? When I was at school, there was a lot of fear about computers. Now, kids aren't born with that fear of technology, and games are a big part of that change. That image, of the kid with the glazed eyes and catatonic gaze, pressing buttons in front of a cathode ray tube – that seems very dated."

needs to include an awareness of issues of spatial design (which may borrow on such fields as architecture, city planning, and amusement park design) and expressive movement (which may borrow from dance and performance) as well as narrative (which may borrow from cinema, theatre, television, and printed texts)." Jenkins quotes **Don Carson**, an ex-senior show designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, who believes game designers can learn from Disney's theme park techniques of 'environmental storytelling'. Carson explains: "The story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through. It is the physical space that does much of the work of conveying the story the designers are trying to tell." In other words, every object and environment in your game has significance.

The combined weight of academic discipline might also add a line of defence against the erosion of our ownership of self. Corporate control of online worlds will no doubt lead to issues of liberty and freedom of information, and research like TL Taylor's might help us when what we do with our in-game characters becomes somebody else's concern. "Unlike most MUDs," says Taylor, "new MMORPG spaces are commercial ventures with particular stakeholders and this is already posing new challenges to the boundaries between the private and corporate. Who exactly owns the bodies and identities in these worlds? What rights do users have, given their role as authors?"

"Eventually we will have games which encourage problem-solving, enable peer-to-peer learning, motivate learning, and provide teachers a chance to monitor results"

The rigour of academic method could help developers do their homework. Where developers often barely have time to eat, academics have all the time in the world to consider: what are we doing when we play videogames? (Krzywinska calls games "a luxury; a kind of excess that's work and not work. It's a denial of death." Try coming up with that one at four in the morning with a head full of code and cold pizza.) Without effective training, Dini believes, the next generation of game developers "will be much like the last; self taught and re-inventing everything again." This dialogue between academy and industry is already happening. MIT recently hosted a two-day conference which brought together game industry leaders, including Warren Spector, Trip Hawkins and Peter Molyneux, to discuss the "current state and future potential of the medium." Jenkins holds regular detentions (sorry, 'seminars'), with leading games houses, most recently some of Electronic Arts'

Biographies



Professor Henry Jenkins
Head of the Comparative Media Lab at MIT, Jenkins sees most computer games as a new kind of spatial story – 'narrative architecture'. "The art of game design is the art of designing compelling, immersive, and challenging worlds."

Timothy Burke
A social historian at Swarthmore College, Burke studied consumerism in African material culture before turning his attention to computer games. His recent research has focused on the similar process of evolution of economic practices and structures within MMORPGs.

Tanya Krzywinska and Geoff King
Working in the media department at Brunel University, Krzywinska and King both have a background in film theory, although, says King, "We're saying very carefully that we're not trying to reduce games to film." Their forthcoming book, 'ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces' (Wallflower Press, 2002), examines the complex inter-relationships between cinema and computer games.



Espen Aarseth
Associate professor in Humanistic Informatics at the University of Bergen, Aarseth coined the term 'ludologist'. "Narratology is hugely overrated as an entry-point to games in general, in my view. It is relevant only to a small subset of games, but even there it's not very illuminating."

Gregory Smith,
Working at Georgia State University – Smith is the editor of 'On a Silver Platter: CD-ROMs and the Promises of a New Technology'. He worked as a programmer for several years before re-entering academia. He believes games and other media have much to learn from each other. "New media forms always borrow from older existing media; that's the way they develop a distinctive language."

TL Taylor
Assistant professor at the Department of Communication, North Carolina State University, Taylor focuses her research on embodiment in online multi-user spaces. "Bodies are ways we mediate identity," she says, "and social space and worlds that are built with this in mind are tapping into a powerful evocative tool."



Jesper Jull
Lecturer in Digital Aesthetics and Communication at the University of Copenhagen, Jull believes that computer games and narrative are at odds. "A lot of the devices used in storytelling are awful in games. Nobody is going to play Hamlet – the game: 'Your father has been murdered. Fail to avenge him.'"

Jonathan Dovey,
A senior lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of the West of England and organiser of the 'Game Cultures' conference in Bristol, July 2001 (see News, **E**101) – Dovey was once a researcher for 'Spitting Image'. "I got interested in games from my background as a film maker and starting to think about what kinds of possibilities interactivity opened up for us."

Dr James Newman,
When Dr Newman, at Edge Hill College, was bought a Dragon 32 at age ten, he realised "the only legitimate use for a computer was to play games." Newman acknowledges games have backstories, but believes they have a very limited role. "When I play a *Super Mario* game, I am not helping Mario rescue the Princess. I want to get to the end of the level without falling down a hole or being killed."

top creatives, to promote his narratologist agenda: "looking at the role of violence in Homer or examining the functions of music in silent cinema, trying to see both parallels and differences between games and earlier storytelling medium."

As always in academia, although there are major ideological rifts, no one claims a monopoly on the truth. All the academics are aware of the fragility of their newborn field, and are quick to stress how the differences of opinion are more useful than hostile. Refreshingly, the major thrust of these new academic perspectives on gaming is about making games better. "Each of these are false oppositions," says Jenkins, "since both sides have a great deal to learn from each other."

References for courses including gaming components:



Software Engineering courses with games development components:
At the University of Essex: BEng in Computer Games and Internet Technology
(http://www.essex.ac.uk/ese/ug/g450.htm)
And an MSc in Computer Games Engineering
(http://www.essex.ac.uk/ese/msc/cge.html)

Art and Design courses with some games development components:
London College of Music and Media BA in Digital Arts
(http://mercury.tvu.ac.uk/diart/bada.html)

Specific games development courses:
John Moores University, Liverpool:
MSc Computer Games Technology
http://www.cms.livjm.ac.uk/courses/cgt/Default.htm

University of Bradford:
BSc Interactive Systems and Video Games Design
http://www.eimc.brad.ac.uk/courses/courses.html

Leeds Metropolitan University:
BSc (Hons) Computer Entertainment Technology
http://prospectus.lmu.ac.uk/olpphp3/detail.php3?course_id=376&attendance=1

The University of Teeside offers BA and BSc courses with a practical focus on games design:
(http://www-scm.tees.ac.uk/courses/degree/compgames.html)
and coding (http://www-scm.tees.ac.uk/courses/degree/compprog.html)

A comprehensive list of games-related courses is maintained by Steve Maddock at Sheffield University:
http://www.dcs.shef.ac.uk/~steve/games/gamesCourses.html

Sir, can I have my Game Boy back?

As **Joe McDonagh**, Elixir games designer, pointed out in his Diary of a Videogame (**E**105), one of his main sources of new recruits already is university graduates. At Teeside University this year, the first students will graduate from the BSc in Computer Games Programming and a BA in Computer Games Design, both courses designed in cooperation with the industry.

So the classroom is already teaching us about gaming. What can gaming do for the class? Can we expect computer gaming to appear on the syllabus? Jenkins, founder of MIT's 'Games To Teach' initiative for educational videogames, seems to think so. "Games will teach best if they are fully integrated into the curriculum and meaningfully supported by other kinds of educational activities." But the pupils of the future won't just be left alone to play *Metal Gear 6* on their PlayStation9. While at the moment "most educational games have all of the entertainment value of a bad lecture and all of the educational value of a bad game," eventually, Jenkins envisions, "we will have games which offer vivid simulations, encourage problem-solving and the rehearsal of core skills and knowledge, enable peer-to-peer teaching, motivate learning, and provide teachers a chance to monitor results."

But will the time when a homework assignment consists of contemplating the ontological problems raised by the secret spaces in *Super Mario Bros.* ever arrive? **Edge** will have to sit down and think about that one.



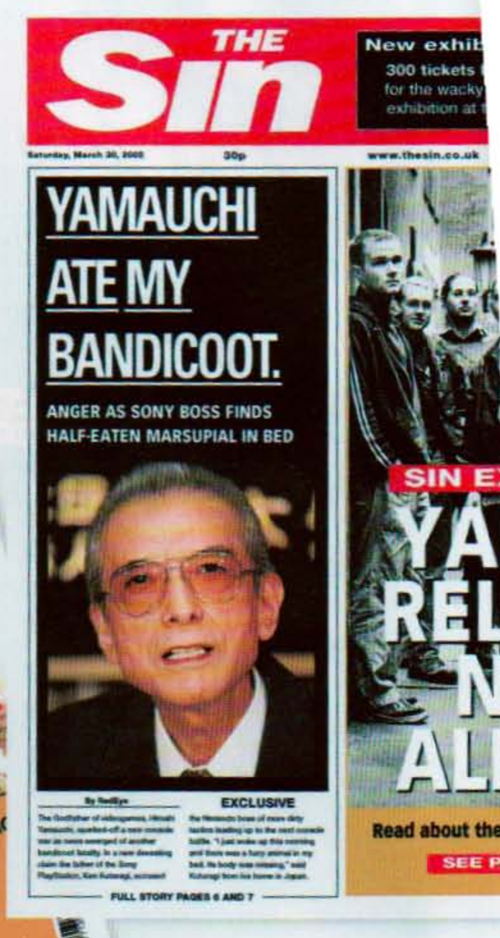




The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time **(left) hinted at the complexities temporal game space offers designers. Hopefully,** ***Project Ego*** **(right) will show the advantages videogames have over the novel**

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Why the mainstream media refuses to accept videogames



"I remember when I wrote about the plans to end the Dreamcast," recalls journalist **Tim Wapshott**, who has written about videogames for 'The Times' for almost a decade. "It was after their announcement and all I did was say what they'd said would happen: you know, 'Sega have said that they are going to stop making the Dreamcast soon and games for it will stop coming in the near future.' And then I got seven or eight rather unpleasant emails. I suppose they weren't death threats, as such, but I did get several vile emails saying 'You die, scum!' and 'DC Livez forever!'"

For some newspaper readers, videogames coverage is a matter of life and death. For some newspaper and magazine writers and editors, however, they're clearly little more than a joke. Games reviews in the mainstream – where they exist – have long been derided by committed gamers for schoolboy factual errors, abuses of technical jargon, loving anything with a licence, reeking of compromise and misinforming potential consumers. They've long been the subject of cynical glances from the specialist press, who often suspect that PR power and laziness is behind most of their decision-making. In fact, with some honourable, hard-won exceptions, mainstream coverage has always been seen as a bit of a joke. With the market here booming, though, and some big-money choices facing consumers in the impending Xbox/GameCube battle, it's just not funny any longer.

"It's still so difficult to get the mainstream to take it seriously," says **Alison Beasley**, of games PR agency, Lincoln Beasley. "The Sunday supplements have huge sections for magazines, books, arts, dance... we're a higher growth sector at retail than all of them put together but they all look down on games." Indeed, money is the one topic around gaming that newspapers always seem eager to leap on. In January, the UK's newspapers picked up on ELSPA figures which demonstrated that games now create more revenue than cinema attendances and quoted its director general Roger Bennett predicting that games exports would soon eclipse music ones. But did

Quote/Unquote:

Steve Boxer, 'The Telegraph', June 2000

"*Hogs Of War* is utterly trivial, shamefully derivative and somewhat rudimentary. But that's of no consequence, because it's genuinely hilarious and fantastically good fun to play. The perfect antidote to all those games that take themselves so seriously that it's almost painful."

'FHM' and 'Loaded'



'FHM's coverage of videogames is getting better; some might say it could hardly get much worse



While 'Loaded' revels in irreverence the reviews leave a lot to be desired. *Top Gun* – 8/10?

those publications then respond to news of this cultural shift by taking the game reviews out of their dark corners in listings mags and IT supplements, or giving their reviewers more than a matchbox-sized column to discuss a new title in? Of course not. Indeed, two broadsheet sections devoted to technology and gaming concerns have folded in the months since.

"Games do quite badly given that the industry is bigger than the cinema and video rental markets," says **Jon Cunningham** of The Red Consultancy, the PR firm which has spent the last six months building up media awareness of the Xbox. "The national press is broadly split into three camps. The first group is those papers which did cover games but don't anymore – the demise of big circulation national supplements like 'Times Interface' and 'Dotcom Telegraph' being two examples. Second are those which don't and show little sign of changing, except to cover 'cross over' stories like the Lara Croft phenomenon or David Beckham's football game. And third are those which do cover games and to their credit are becoming increasingly well informed and devoting more space to it, but these are in the minority."

It's not just the limited space that's the issue, then – it's the way in which it's used, too. "What I always find funny are certain magazines where they dive right in there like it was 'C&VG' in 1986," says former 'Computer & Video Games' editor **Paul Davies**. "They use all the hackneyed phrases. They'll say, 'the control of the characters is really fluid' and you just think, what the fuck does that mean? 'Playability is good, but the graphics could be better.' It's a bit of a waste of time, really – they're paying lip service to it because they know PlayStation made it cool and that a lot of their readers are into it."

Writing in 'The Guardian' last October, writer **Mike Anderiesz** reviewed the PS2 port of *Resident Evil Code: Veronica* and explained, "Unlike the Dreamcast version, here the backgrounds are fully rendered in polygons rather than flat textures. But other than that it is the same game with all the same flaws." This was news to anyone who'd played both, of course, but also a textbook example of the unnecessary and erroneous way in which mainstream reviewers often abuse terminology.

In the same paper, a year before, the Online section quoted **Robbie Bach** asserting that the Xbox would "'be the biggest launch Microsoft have ever done.' The 18-month marketing blitz will cost $500,000. 'You can't do this half-hearted. It's a long-term investment and we take it very seriously.'" It may only be a typo, but it's the kind of mistake that would surely have been spotted if it had been made about Ford's, Sainsbury's or Disney's spend on a major new launch.

Alternatively, there's the downright inscrutable, like **Nigel Pizey**, sub-editor and games reviewer at the 'London Evening Standard's 'Hot Tickets' listings magazine, who in November 2001 wrote a joint review of *FIFA 2002* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* – an age-old games mag device, of course, but Pizey's conclusions are quite unique. "Waddya want?" he asks. "You want quick, simple play, an after-the-pub bit of fun? Try *Pro Evolution Soccer*. It doesn't mess about, but gets straight to the action, even if spurious teams, such as London, are included. But if easy is a word you scoff at, then EA's *FIFA 2002* comes with a pedigree that's hard to match. Thorough, impressive and with subtle nuances built in to give the real flavour of footie, this takes a bit of time and patience to get to grips with."

Although the national press tends to make the most spectacular blunders, it is lifestyle journalists in particular – those from the men's, and fashion and music titles that began covering games on the back of PlayStation's mid-90s success – who come in for special scrutiny from their peers at specialist gaming magazines.

> "They use all the hackneyed phrases. They'll say, 'the control system is fluid' and you just think, what the fuck does that mean?"

Sony worked out long ago that an exotic vacation is a greater temptation to the average lifestyle journalist than a rainy afternoon at a developer in Croydon, and the sector has been tainted with the suspicion of freeloading and fakery ever since.

"The constant moan," adds Davies, "is that lifestyle magazines get treated well and get nice things, whereas the people who work on the games mags and spend much more time working for games, and really care about them, don't." The moan used to be that the mainstream never even acknowledged the existence of videogames at all – as Alison Beasley, who has worked in the industry for 18 years, recalls "We all used to get very excited if a game or a developer made the mainstream press. If someone found a story in the paper, we'd all gather round and talk about it – even though it was nearly always negative. Back when we were working on Spectrum or Amstrad games, if there were any stories going in the newspapers or the style magazines, everybody would know about them and we'd all be fighting over the space. Even though they always seemed to focus on the violence or piracy or some other moral issue, we'd all want to get a mention of the game we were working on into them because that was all there was."

"I wrote for 'For Him' magazine [the original incarnation of what is now 'FHM'] in the mid-late '80s," recalls Tim Wapshott. "I wrote a split column – one month video releases, one month games. At the time, both of them were seen as crazy things that would never take off."

Given the brutal criticism Sega's promotional strategies have been subject to since the launches of the Saturn and DC, it perhaps poignant that the company's earlier efforts are singled out by Alison Beasley as making key strides in bringing videogames to the attention of the mass media. "With the Master System and the Mega Drive," she recalls, "Sega spent a lot of money. They went out and got the high street retailers and the indies. They were the first ones to make the effort and that had an impact. Once people like Woolworth's are involved, then other people, including the press, will jump on board." Even if it was Sonic's streetwise status and Sega's investment that helped open the door to the mainstream in the early '90s, though, that shrank into insignificance once Sony and their PlayStation burst right through it.

"Before PlayStation, it was impossible to get into the lifestyles," says **Danielle Woodyatt**, who now runs her own games-centred PR agency, Lunch. "You just didn't see it. It was Jeff Glendenning and **Alan Wellsman** [the PR and marketing figureheads at SCEE at the time] who changed all that."

Cool crowd

The story of the creation of cool around PlayStation via Ministry of Sound, *Wipeout* and Lara Croft's appearance, in virtual Gucci, on the cover of 'The Face' magazine in 1997 has been repeated too often to need examining again here, but it's no less important for that. Sony's PR methodology consolidated the next-gen wonders of 3D graphics and CD sound. To the notoriously cash-strapped young decision makers at Britain's then-booming style magazines, these people with their parties and their licensed dance soundtracks and their free toys were good new friends to have. Everybody knew the first names of a handful of key PlayStation PR personnel. In a world of bewildering new technology, they were seen as trustworthy and honest about the games that mattered. They were seen more as club-style promoters rather than gadget freaks, and they always seemed to be having big, free parties, and better things to do than stay in all night playing videogames. But winning over the cool crowd was just part of it. In relation to the wider print media, wooing editorial attention was simply a matter of acknowledging their existence.

In only the beginning of 1997, however, Wellsmann explained that much of their supposed PR genius simply boiled down to getting games



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Quote/Unquote:



By Steve Boxer on the PS2 CPU, 'The Telegraph', Sept 1999

"The bespoke chip uses full 128bit architecture throughout, meaning you get not just a four-fold increase in speed, but potentially a 296 increase in subtlety…"

Quote/Unquote:

By Tim Wapshott, 'The Times', September 1999

"The short, perfectly creased suits running Nintendo were always after the biggest action in the home console market. It started with the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1985, five years later replaced it with the SNES and five years after that with the Saturn."



Magazines such as 'Ministry' still refuse to discuss games



'The Guide' offers better than average game reviews

everbody who might conceivably be interested, rather than preaching to the converted. "It's almost unforgivable not to budget for the mainstream media," he told 'CTW' in 1997. "Even including local newspapers and the like, we've got something like 90 people on our UK mainstream mailout list. To send out copies of a new game to every single one of them, you're still talking about well under £1000, which is nothing really, especially when it's bringing you to a potential audience of many millions. You can spend that flying a single pet specialist-press journalist to California for a preview."

That logic fed Sony's biggest long-term PR triumphs: ubiquity and accessibility. Their importance cannot be overstated, and they haven't been matched by any subsequent launch. When Dreamcast units were first dispatched to selected editorial staff from the lifestyle sector in the summer of 1999, they were supplied with European two-pin plugs, composite leads and no instructions. The average gamer would quickly have resolved such minor technical complications, but for many non-initiates in the magazine world, the absence of a genuine plug-in-and play opportunity out of the box was enough to stop them ever getting round to getting to know the delights their DCs offered. In fact, the last real burst of excitement about games in the mainstream press came with the build-up to the PS2's launch and carefully-plotted PR trips to Tokyo en route. Given the way they faithfully repeated promises of 'Toy Story'-quality graphics, effects powerful enough to save George Lucas millions on next 'Star Wars' film and 'real' emotions at the time, it is perhaps understandable if the mainstream has appeared a little sheepish and reticent about games coverage since.

Men only

Either way, today's readers are left to make do with the printed legacy of the mainstreaming of gaming: a scattershot range of review columns, a regular run of competitions, the occasional news snippet and the very occasional game-related feature. In the realm of glossy magazines, it's only in titles aimed at teenagers and young men where a regular monthly review column is the norm. In recent years, some supposedly higher-end men's magazines such as GQ have even stopped reviewing games, as though the association would somehow tarnish their sophisticated image. But that's nothing compared to the attitude of the women's glossy sector.

"What I find amazing," says Alison Beasley, "is that there are women out there who play games, and all these women who program, design and play games and are successful in the industry, but the women's magazines ignore them completely." Most men's magazines know they can't afford to ignore games – internal research for one popular fast-car magazine, for example, revealed that 70 per cent of its readership played consoles – but they don't want to be seen to be paying 'too' much attention to them either. "We know we'd be cutting off our nose to spite our face if we ever ditched the games reviews," admits a staffer at one leading girl- and gadget-heavy men's magazine, "but no one really cares about it. If the music reviews came in and Enrique Iglesias was album of the month, then everybody would argue with it, because we know who fits the magazine. Our editor really doesn't give a shit about the games page – as long as it comes in, is no bother and makes basic sense, that's enough. A lot of people in our office play games – which just proves that the demographic is a lot broader than people generally give credit for – but they don't talk about it or necessarily want to be seen to be into them."

newspapers review games that make no sense in the context of either their readers or the market.

"Sometimes you get the impression that the selection of games is just down to whoever took the reviewer out to lunch that week," says Davies. "If you really don't care about it, you really haven't got a clue, you've got to be careful. You wouldn't get a Val Doonican re-release reviewed in the music section of a men's magazine, but if you look at the games selection and the selections are really odd, or random. It suggests that gaming's out of touch with the culture." It's this kind of misrepresentation of gaming's potential which so often frustrates observers of mainstream games coverage. Worse still than choosing a bad selection of games is choosing terrible games and then saying they're good – or vice-versa. This is

> "Our editor really doesn't give a shit about the games page – as long as it makes sense, that's enough"

"There's almost a pride in not knowing about them," says **Nick Gillett**, who writes a weekly games page for 'The Guardian's 'Guide' supplement. "Even though there's some really interesting stuff going on in that area, people tend to sideline the whole thing as a minority interest." **Dawn Beasley** puts it more simply "There was an incident last year where a review literally went, 'I played this for two minutes, got fucked off with it and put it down.' Where else would it be okay to say that?" In the case of 'Loaded', it's difficult to complain that games are treated much less respectfully than films or records – this is, after all, a magazine with a music-reviewing monkey which once wrote up its screen review of 'The Gingerbread Man' as a sequence of encounters between different biscuits. Reviews editor **Piers Townley**, has been writing about games in the magazine for five years. "We're not going to talk about pixel X, Y, Z. We're going to talk about how people experience these games. Those that we shout about are especially relevant to our readers, but we're not going to shout about them in specific, technical terms. They just want to know what it's like to get in the tank and shoot the helicopter, or to play as David Beckham."

Or, as **Ciaran Brennan**, who began writing about games at 'Zzap!' in 1986 and is now director of Bastion PR, puts it, "If you don't want to lose them, you've just got to talk about what's on people's screens – nothing below the telly." There are definite limits to what can be done with the small space allocated to most games sections, of course and the merits and faults of the language of mainstream reviews is a subjective and complicated issue. What is a lot more clear-cut, however, is the fact that some magazines and

where any other qualifications or justifications regarding games coverage cease to matter. Recommending a poor game because of its official licence, obscenity count or because it came from your favourite PR, despite the fact that it's a dog to play, is the biggest crime in the eyes of critics of mainstream coverage. "Take two games at the moment," says Gillett: "*GTAIII* and *Hidden Invasion*. They're both £40, but one will give you hours of complete enjoyment and surprises, and the other will give you 20 minutes of frustration. It's important that we do the job of letting people know that."

In case some of those who criticise newspaper and lifestyle magazine reviewers haven't been paying attention lately, it's worth noting that some lifestyle reviewers do make a concerted effort to look beyond the nearest press release. In the two years he has written 'The Guide's game reviews, Gillett has been a constant champion of the neglected glories of the DC and recently reviewed *Advance Wars* twice, just to remind people how good it was. Over at 'FHM', the December 2001 issue managed to cram three reviews, an accessories guide including Bleemcast and a brief introduction to importing consoles. The trouble is that, even when they are making an effort to expose their readers to new gaming horizons, writers who care about getting it right can find that the industry itself is as much of an obstacle as any games-hating editor.

For starters, there's the issue of disappearing games coverage. The demise of many newspaper gaming sections is no mysterious conspiracy, but a simple product of economics. As Brennan puts it, "'The Sun' started a Saturday centre spread on games a couple of years ago.



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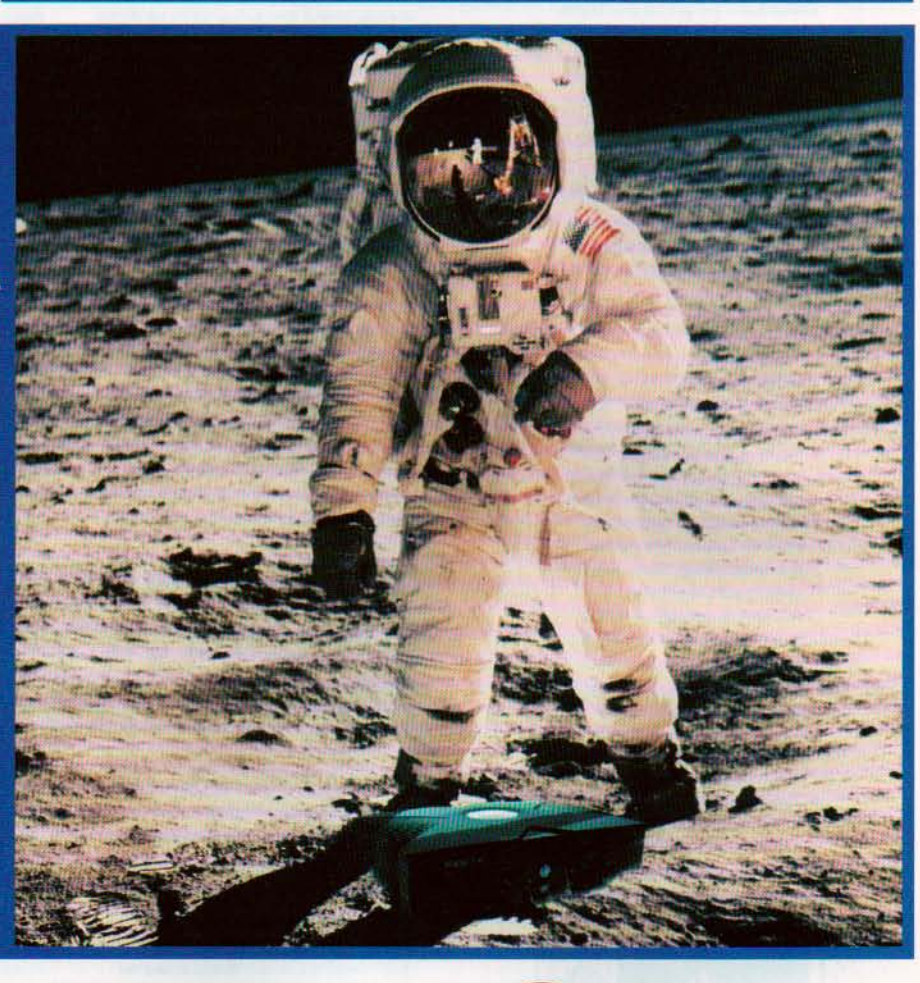


GET YOURS TODAY ● Page 17

XBOX FOUND ON THE MOON

New console could be an alien spacecraft

● Page 24



MANIC MANOR

Eccentric computer boffin wins £1 million

A relatively unknown computer programmer took away the top prize on telly's 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?' last night. In a dramatic twist Matthew Smith – who wrote the popular Spectrum game *Manic Miner* – was asked the question: "Who wrote the classic Spectrum game,

■ *by DIRK WAHLBECK*

Manic Miner?" for the million pound prize. Smith vowed to buy a mansion with his winnings and fill it with a collection of weird...

Full story: Pages 8 & 9



Quote/Unquote:

By Simon Munk
on *Red Faction*, 'Maxim', Aug 2001

"The possibilities are innumerable, and it all makes for an involving and unique proposition. In fact the twists and the plot line are enough to make this an above-average shoot 'em up on its own, but the Geo-Mod technology turns this into something great."

QUOTE/UNQOTE:

By Harriett Messenger, 'The Evening Standard', January 2002

"Don't get me wrong. *Breath of Fire* isn't a bad little handheld at all, but there is one feature that drives me mad. I have experienced this in other games, *Zelda* in particular, and it really makes me rant like a mad woman. Why do I have to suffer the constant stopping and starting of a game just to read mindless text that drivels on and on? 'You'll perish if you don't wake up,' 'We must go,' and 'Fancy a shag?' Sorry, wrong game. These little irritating interruptions don't help me in the game. They just drive me crazy. The reason I play videogames is because I hate reading books – I'm virtually illiterate. Sort it out."

EXCLUSIVE



'Front' reviews may soon get a tips section. Or is that a spelling mistake?

but it only lasted a few weeks. There just weren't any ads coming in – and if they can't get the revenue, they can't justify the coverage." Film companies are much heavier investors in news paper advertising than games publishers, and the greater coverage they receive reflects this.

"Games magazines need games advertising to survive," observes Tim Wapshott. "Newspapers don't. Newspapers have been pleasantly surprised come November and December when ad revenues come in from games, but it's still not the same as Ford taking out a full-page ad every Saturday." The next mitigating factor is that games don't generate celebrities in the way that films and music do. "Developers are faceless as far as the nationals are concerned," says Alison Beasley. "Nobody at the papers wants to talk to them." When PRs are able to promote a game with a face that's ubiquitous in the wider culture – a Britney Spears or a David Beckham – it's a different story. "We announced that Bam! had the licence to make games based on Aardman films and they all wanted to run a picture of Wallace and Gromit."

Brennan says there's another deep-rooted reason why games struggle for space in the mainstream. "Videogames are essentially all the same. Just like there are only six jokes, there are only six kinds of game: RTS, football, driving, shooting, fighting and platform. You're going to be writing more or less the same thing about different games every week, which is why they don't make good copy for the national press."

If games companies and gamers want their software treated more like films and music are in the mainstream, they will continue to struggle as long as the process of obtaining code is so difficult. Important albums are sent to music magazines in time for their reviews to beat the record to release, big films are previewed to critics months in advance, but games are, in the words of Townley, "a nightmare, a complete nightmare." Release dates slip at the last minute, again and again, and PRs are left red-faced having promised material for magazine deadlines, some of which work two months ahead of their newsstand appearances.

"It's like a marathon trying to get hold of copies of one game – and you have to do that for a third of all the games you get," says Davies. "The PR will leave a message on your phone saying 'You know that code we were going to get you on Monday? We haven't heard anything yet.' That means you won't be able to get them on the phone for the next week. If it's deadline time and the game hasn't turned up, you're going to do something else instead. Someone's not going to be a hero at deadline time and hold everything up just so they can get hold of an important game and say 'It's the best game ever.' They're going to say, 'Let's just stick *Woody Woodpecker Racing* in. Somebody will like it – and if not, we can just make the review funny.'"

Although PRs are usually at the mercy of publishers and developers when promised code or debug hardware fails to materialise, there are others who mainstream reviewers blame for perpetuating some of the problems with mainstream coverage. "There are some PRs who seem to have been briefed by publishers only to get good coverage," says Gillett. "They ring you up and harangue you if you criticise a game, even when it's clearly terrible. One company seem to actually seem to specialise in bad games and getting them reviewed by people who don't know any better. I quite often get PRs ringing up and saying, 'When's that game I sent you going in?' I'll say, 'But you only sent me the demo level,' and they say 'Why can't you just review it from that?'"

Dawn Beasley recalls another incident "where somebody from a men's magazine was taken to LA to write a piece about a game and the PR offered them all the cocaine and prostitutes they wanted, just because that's what they thought people from the lad's mags expected." Other lifestyle writers say there are still some companies who patronise them, ignore them, get code to low-selling specialist titles first; some have already received GC review code, but thus far have no idea whether Nintendo Europe will ever get them test machines to play it on. Others contend that there are still simple means of helping them out that are overlooked: they're often still sent games without instructions, or game images they can't open on their humbly-specced computer.

There is one final, less tangible factor behind the current neglect of games in the UK print media: the fact, despite its commercial gains, the UK's gaming culture has not seen a parallel growth in perceived coolness since the PlayStation's heyday. If anything, there is a sense that current publisher conservatism is hindering the cachet of games, and that nothing has done for the 128bit console landscape of 2002 what *Wipeout* and PlayStation managed in the late 1990s. "As soon as it's not a cult any more," Gillett contends, "lazy fucker journalists don't want to do it because there's no cachet in it anymore." Townley agrees. "If you work in the industry it's easy to think, 'games are so cool, everyone's into them,' but people do still see it as a bit trainspotterish."



Get ready to rumble

"Gaming doesn't feel as edgy as when PlayStation started," says **Dan Stevens**, whose music PR firm the Darling Department was recruited by Sony to spread news of *Rez* within different circles. "With the backing of games like *Rez*, I think there's a concerted effort to do something about that. They may not be the biggest sellers, but it's important that they help establish which is the coolest console." Darling's promotional push saw *Rez* covered by dance music mags and design journal 'Creative Review'.

"I'm not a gamer," says Stevens. "I bought my PlayStation on a Saturday afternoon because it was only £60. But people in the games industry do say there are more of these kinds of games being made now. Provided that happens, we will have more coverage and wider cultural relevance for games." Perhaps more publishers should focu on broadening the appeal of gaming in this way rather than disappointing mainstream consumers with glossy looking products which only deliver bland gaming experiences.

Despite the malaise currently affecting the mainstream coverage of games, other observers are similarly upbeat. "Games are overlapping mor and more with films and music now," says Townley, "and it's inevitable that they will get more attention as that process continues." Brennan ha an even grander vision of the future "Look at Xbo and PS2. The games look fantastic. So can you imagine how they're going to look in ten years' time? Games are going to get to the stage where they completely overwhelm film and music, and then the media won't be able to ignore them anymore."

"GAMES ARE GOING TO GET TO THE STAGE WHERE THEY COMPLETELY OVERWHELM FILM AND MUSIC, AND THEN THE MEDIA WON'T BE ABLE TO IGNORE THEM ANYMORE"

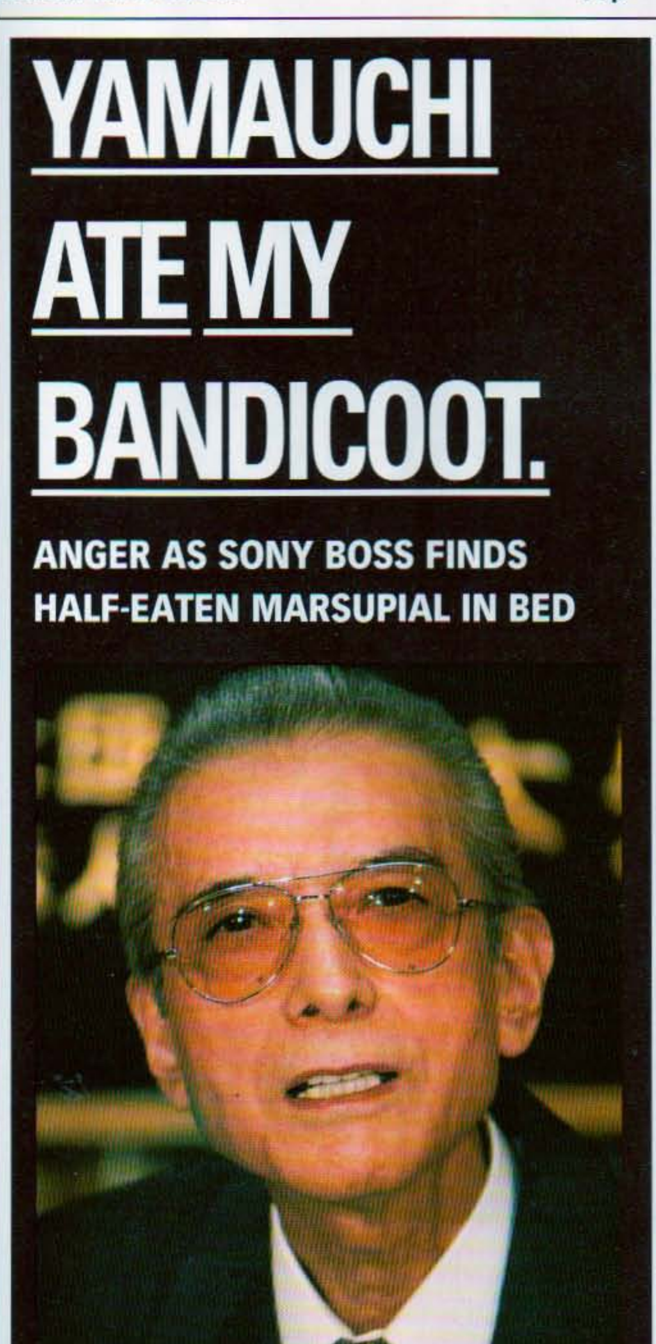


New exhibition opens!

300 tickets have to be won
for the wacky new videogame exhibition at the Tate Modern



Saturday, March 30, 2002 | 30p | www.thesin.co.uk



YAMAUCHI ATE MY BANDICOOT.

ANGER AS SONY BOSS FINDS HALF-EATEN MARSUPIAL IN BED

By RedEye

EXCLUSIVE

The Godfather of videogames, Hiroshi Yamauchi, sparked-off a new console war as news emerged of another bandicoot fatality. In a new devasting claim the father of the Sony PlayStation, Ken Kutaragi, accused the Nintendo boss of more dirty tactics leading up to the next console battle. "I just woke up this morning and there was a furry animal in my bed. Its body was missing," said Kuturagi from his home in Japan.

FULL STORY PAGES 6 AND 7

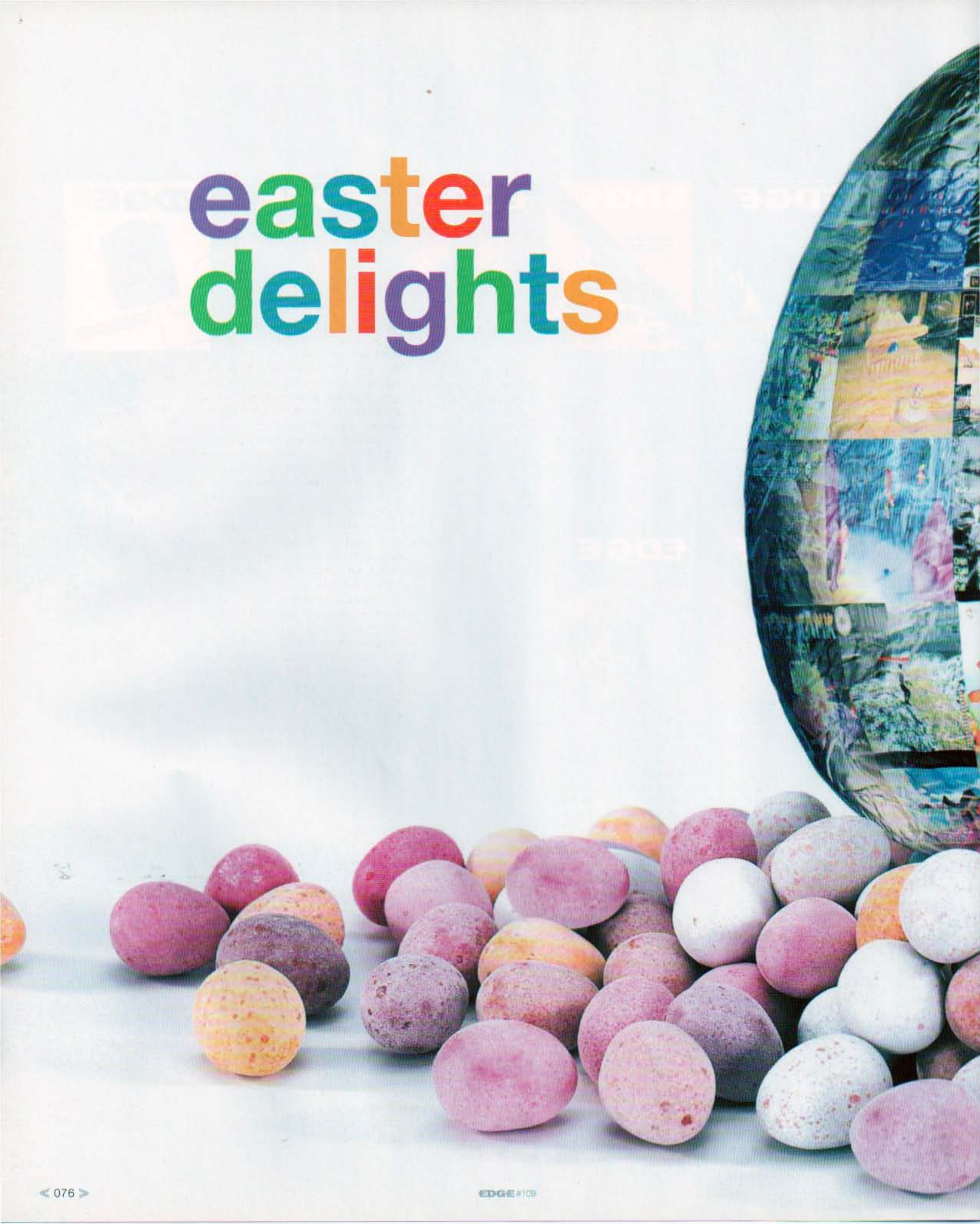
SIN EXCLUSIVE

YAROZ8 RELEASE NEW ALBUM!

Read about their early bedroom antics!

SEE PAGES 4 AND 5

easter delights





Edge hunts out some of videogame's most cherished secrets in its Easter egg special

Undocumented secrets are now a staple part of the videogame experience, but the Easter egg has not always been encouraged by publishers. Although surprise elements are almost demanded by gamers today the very first Easter egg was conceived out of fear and frustration. The story begins in 1979 in a small coders workshop at Atari Inc.

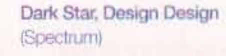
"Those of us who stayed at Atari called ourselves the Dumb Shits Club," recalls **Warren Robinett**, the man credited with creating the first Easter egg. "They made $50 million and we made $20,000." Atari's decision never to credit its coders, either within the software or on the box cover would eventually prove disastrous. While many of the most talented programmers left to join rival companies, the founders of Apple (Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak) included, Warren Robinett was to exact his revenge in a more subtle manner.

Created on the Atari VCS in 1979 and released in 1980, *Adventure* was a simple arcade adventure which required the player to pick up objects in one room to overcome obstacles and defeat creatures in others. But five per cent of the space taken up on the 2K cartridge was dedicated to a secret room bearing the phrase, 'Created by Warren Robinett' – in strobing hues. Later the coder would admit, "I just wanted my name in coloured lights."

Robinett never expected anyone to discover the secret room; and he certainly didn't make it easy. >

Only if the player made a map of the entire maze would they discover a tiny chamber which was inaccessible until an obscure bridge was crossed. In the chamber was a grey wall containing one 'invisible' grey pixel. The grey dot could be picked up and carried, but only if it was placed in the exact location in the centre of a wall at the other side of the map would the secret message reveal itself. Just weeks after the game was released a boy from Salt Lake City sent Atari a letter about the credit. Fortunately, Robinett had already left the company.

Although developers now base whole games around the concept of hidden surprises, Robinett's wilful mischievousness is probably the overriding reason developers continue to add elements into their games which 99 per cent of gamers will never discover. Here then, accompanied with some developer favourites, are a few of the more memorable – and obscure – videogame Easter eggs which have been inspired by Robinett's moment of rebellion.

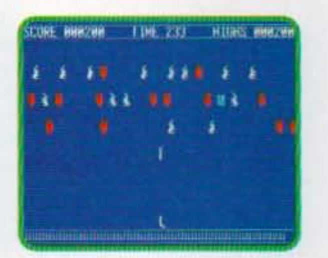


Dark Star, Design Design (Spectrum)



Keen fans of the Easter egg, Mancunian codeshop Design Design included one of the finest examples of the art in *Dark Star*, a 3D shoot 'em up. By entering a password – initially very hard to discover, but later revealed by magazines – players could peruse Spectacle, a teletext-themed collection of over 100 pages of jokes, thoughts on game design and criticism of videogame journalists. You can download it at http://homepages.enterprise.net/cavan/ysac/spectacle.shtml

Lotus Turbo Challenge 2, Magnetic Fields (Amiga)



Entering the password 'DUX' enabled access to a hidden, and highly competent, recreation of the arcade machine *Carnival*. It's odd, then, that most veteran gamers tend to first recall *Lotus Turbo Challenge 2*'s other, non-interactive egg. Listening closely to the opening music revealed a near subliminal, gruff-voiced message, "You will not copy this game." Lenslock, eat your blurry heart out.

Monkey Island series, LucasArts (PC and Amiga)



Home to some of the most amusing eggs and sly references to grace videogame history, the *Monkey Island* quartet is a veritable treasure-trove. **Edge**'s favourites include the underwater sequence in the debut adventure, in which Guybrush – contrary to LucasArts point 'n' click doctrine – actually dies if immersed for over ten minutes [see inset], and the famous 'stump joke'. In the floppy disk version of the first *Monkey Island*, clicking on an obscure tree stump in a forest maze led to a wickedly funny practical joke in which players were asked to insert nonexistent disks in order to visit an exciting underground world. In the third game, in a pleasingly cyclical gag, a similarly nondescript area of scenery led to Guybrush popping up through that very tree stump.

Elite, Acornsoft (BBC Micro)



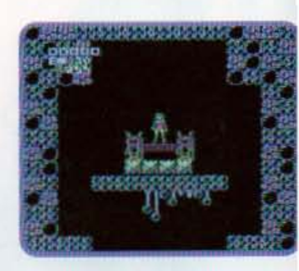
Unfortunately, the BBC Micro version of *Elite* had no extra missions, partly because of the Generation ship which took up nearly 1k of the 22k of space available. The ship could only be discovered if a rare object (the Horn of Stokes) was picked up from Alioth and ferried to Usatqura without the Cobra MkIII taking any damage whatsoever. The Generation ship would then appear in random locations throughout the eight galaxies.

Ghost 'n Goblins, Capcom (Arcade)



This one is dedicated to all the lonely coin-op obsessives who did nothing but try the silliest joystick/button combinations to uncover hidden secrets. Hit a tombstone 14 times and then wait until the timer has almost run out. At the last moment hit the tombstone for the 15th time and a spellcaster will turn Arthur into a frog. Once the spell wears off Arthur will reappear with infinite time to rack up points.

Metroid, Nintendo (NES)



Reach the end of the original *Metroid* and Samus reveals herself in all her glory, providing one of the greatest surprises in videogame history. But it is possible to play through the entire game as the scantily clad Samus by simply typing 'Justin Bailey' into the option screen. A cheap 8bit thrill, but still amusing nonetheless.

Duke Nukem 3D, 3D Realms (PC)



Possibly the most Easter egg-laden game in existence, the original PC iteration of *Duke Nukem 3D* is a completist's delight. From secrets involving 'The Terminator' to 'The Simpsons', *Quake* to '2001: A Space Odyssey', *Doom* to Indiana Jones, 3D Realms' much-loved FPS is replete with cunningly hidden treats. One level, for example, is actually – when viewed in a build engine map editor – a crude (yet recognisable) model of a 'Star Trek' spacecraft.

Doom II, id, (PC)



Doom II's final level contains a short piece of speech and a cameo appearance. Given the lack of sound software (and, indeed, sound hardware functionality) available at the time, it's quite remarkable that a number of gamers not only recognised it as a reversed sentence, but actually deciphered it: "To win the game



Developer choice:

Dene Carter, managing director, Big Blue Box

1. Super Mario Brothers (NES)
Jump out of the top of the play area and walk into a new area with warps to levels 2, 3 and 4. Pure genius.

2. Castlevania: Symphony of the Night (PS)
If you have the patience to kill enough werewolves then Snickersnee, an incredibly powerful sword, is generated. It goes through enemies like headlice through an infants' school.

3. Nethack (PC)
Feeling tired and oppressed? Inscribe 'Elbereth' onto the floor and nothing will touch you. Very eerie to be surrounded by Wraiths who dare not touch you.

4. Dungeon Keeper (PC)
Access the Full Moon levels: some levels only show up during a full moon, picked out on the map by a moon-flag.

5. Chaos (Spectrum)
If you ride an undead creature, your Wizard becomes undead too, and thus untouchable by anything undead.

Alternatively, get a nice, cheap illusory creature, trap it within a gooey blob and free it. Voilà: the illusion is now a bona fide monster.

Developer choice:

Matt Wilkinson, technical director, Bam!

1. Manx TT (Arcade)
You can turn all of the bikes into sheep and race around riding bare sheep-back.

2. Duke Nukem 3D (PC)
Lots of amusing stuff in this game – including a hidden level that is an exact copy of a *Doom* level.

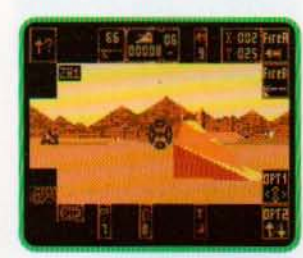
3. Daytona (Arcade)
On the oval track, the seemingly innocent spinning fruit machine reels can be stopped by pressing the 'Start' button three times as you drive under it.

4. Day of the Tentacle (PC)
Aside from being a brilliant game in its own right, *Day of the Tentacle* is the sequel to *Maniac Mansion*, and the entire first game is included in *DOTT* if you know where to look.

5. Uridium (Spectrum)
Contains an entirely new hidden world that was never revealed to the public because it was subsequently unhidden, repackaged, and then sold as the 'New Improved 128K Version'.

you must kill me, John Romero." It's true – firing into an awkward-to-hit hole is the only way to finish *Doom II*, with a 'noclip' cheat revealing the target inside to be Romero's severed, digitised head on a stick. Oddly prophetic, in a sense.

Battlezone 2000, Atari (Lynx)



Originally developed as a more complex update of the arcade hit, *Battlezone 2000* was also developed with 'solid' 3D graphics. Atari lacked confidence in this reworking of the original, however, and altered it to adhere closer to the classic blueprint, including a return to vector 3D. However, in a highly unusual move – it being a cartridge game – they agreed to include the former *Battlezone 2000* candidate as an Easter egg. With 2000 levels to play through, it's probably the biggest egg ever. There are instructions (and notes from one of its programmers) at http://songbird.atari.net/lynxdomain/bz2krob.txt

Various titles, created by Tom Hall (Various)



A sprite created for the *Commander Keen* games by erstwhile id staffer Tom Hall, the Dopefish should have passed – like its countless thousands of peers – into absolute obscurity. Unusually, though, Dopefish has become one of the most renowned (and prolific) Easter eggs in PC gaming. It has made appearances in *Daikatana*, *Max Payne* and *Quake 2*, among many others, and even has its own fan sites and Usenet group. Visit www.dopefish.com for a full history.

Star Fox, Nintendo (SNES)



One of **Edge**'s favourite eggs in *Star Fox* is the warp hole which takes McCloud to the secret slot machine boss. Simply take the bottom course to the first space stage then bomb the huge meteor until the huge bird appears. Ram into the bird and you will be transported to a stage containing a huge one-arm bandit. Shoot the lever to produce a number of amusing effects.

Super Metroid, Nintendo (SNES)



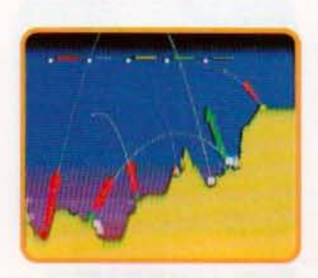
In the final dash to escape the planet, it's possible to take a detour and save the friendly aliens from earlier in the game. This has no bearing, alas, on the ending sequence – players still have to complete it in under three hours to see another scantily-clad Samus.

Broken Sword II, Revolution (PC and PS)



Giving a chocolate bar to a ghost in the London Underground allows access to a hidden exit on the left-hand side of the area. This leads to a screen from *Beneath a Steel Sky* – a previous Revolution adventure. Another egg [see inset] involves finding a precise point on a wall. Clicking it makes your onscreen charge, with her back to the screen, lift her top – immediately solving, by unorthodox means, an otherwise awkward puzzle.

Duke Nukem 3D, Lobotomy (Saturn)



In terms of long-term value, this gift to Saturn owners could well be the best Easter egg ever created. With a save file from fellow Lobotomy port *Quake* inside the Saturn's internal memory, an additional option would appear on the *Duke Nukem 3D* option screen: *Death Tank Zwei*, one of the most simple yet utterly absorbing multiplayer games ever created. Think *Worms*, but realtime; single screen and magnificently frantic; simple deformable scenery ablaze with elementary yet thoroughly apposite pyrotechnics. Sadly, the proviso of buying two Saturn games limited it to a tragically narrow audience of seriously hardcore Sega aficionados and games journalists.

System Shock 2, Looking Glass, (PC)



As the game begins, it's possible to find a hidden basketball. Later, in the gym at the recreation deck, using it to hit the basket (although not dunking the ball – it's impossible) leads to a mysterious message. It's from a group of monkeys: "While you've been stockpiling ammo, med hypos and hi-tech gadgets, we've collected every last piece of nuts, bananas and coconuts on board. Just say the word, and you'll get plenty to eat, an attractive hirsute companion, and a tyre swing of your own. In the end, isn't that what really matters?" Quite.

Developer choice:

Ed Bartlett, lead designe[r,] Bitmap Brothers

1. Crazy Taxi (Arcade)
Playing *355 Challenge* in an arcade, I glanced to my left [...] lining up on the starting grid [...] to see some guy playing Cra[zy] Taxi using a bicyle rikshaw.

2. Sim City 2000 (PC)
I remember the helicopter co[...] onscreen for the first time, a[...] some invisible force made m[...] click on it. Just as I'd secretl[y] hoped, it went spiralling out [...] control to cries of 'Mayday!'

3. Dig Dug (Arcade)
Tron and *Dig Dug* were two [...] favourite games as a child, s[...] imagine my delight upon find[...] out about a version of *Deadl[y] Discs* in *Dig Dug*. Bizarrely, it also featured graphics from *Burgertime*.

4. Excel 97 Flight Sim (PC)
Around '97 I was a QA mana[...] and so using Excel rather mo[...] than is healthy. It became sli[...] less boring when I found out [...] there was a basic 3D flight s[...] hidden behind those rows an[d] columns. Apparently Excel 2[...] has a *Spy Hunter*-style game although I've not seen it.

5. Z (PC)
Z was full of Easter eggs, ra[...] from personal jokes about c[...] members of staff, card-playi[...] robots during lulls in gamep[...] and Christmas trees on the 2[...] of December.

Developer choice:

Jonathan Smith, chief game designer, Codemasters

1. Dark Castle (Mac)
Retreating from the turkey table on Christmas Day, 1988 or so, I found this neatly-animated platformer delightfully enhanced with the completely unexpected addition of a Christmas tree in the castle entrance hall. "Wicked!" I said – because I said that sort of thing back then.

2. Operation Flashpoint (PC)
Having spent most of last year working on this game, I thought I knew its every secret. But Christmas Eve brought scattered Christmas trees and a touch of glitter to the Malden Islands, reminding me of *Dark Castle* and invoking childish glee.

3. Sonic 2 (Mega Drive)
As staff writer on 'Mega' magazine, I had to test all the cheats which got sent in – and this was definitely one of the best. An unfeasibly arcane process of option-fiddling and button-holding resulted in the ability to edit level data by placing new sprites at will. Hours of entertainment ensued.

4. Counter-Strike (PC)
Locating the hidden credits texture has enlivened death-minutes on every map; but my favourite is definitely Office, smartly situated behind a breakable wall.

5. TOCA 2 (PC)
"Does the f***ing scriptwriter ever f***ing read these out loud, or does he just f***ing write them? Bastard!" Tiff Needell after one commentary stumble too many, in a not-very-well-hidden PC data file.

Freespace 2, Volition (PC)



Still a piece of choice eye candy even now, Volition's space-based shoot 'em up features a large number of cheats. The best, though, is an egg accessed by typing 'arrrwalktheplank' during a mission. A pirate ship – that is, ship in the traditional sea-faring sense – drops out of hyperspace and proceeds to fight for your cause, unless you foolishly open fire upon it. Its crew, visible on its deck, are *Freespace 2* development team members.

Perfect Dark, Rare (N64)



A simple egg, but a popular one. Hidden throughout *Perfect Dark*'s levels are various small pieces of cheese. Finding these – and some, without the assistance of a guide, will take a fair while to locate – leads to the grand bonus of… nothing at all. They're just *there*. Incidentally, although not really an egg per se, you can also find a BAFTA statue inside the safe during the G5 building level – a reference to the one Rare got for *GoldenEye* and, perhaps, to the company's hopes for *Perfect Dark* at the time of launch.



Super Mario 64, Nintendo (N64)

This is not strictly an Easter egg but it provides a puzzling conundrum to those who complete the game. Once all 120 stars are collected Mario can shoot himself out of the cannon – found in the fields near the drawbridge – on to the castle's roof. There he finds Yoshi who gives him a special winged cap, 100 lives and a double-jump. But these abilities are completely redundant leaving some gamers to speculate that a special Star Road section was left out of the game due to time pressures. Of course, more nimble gamers will have discovered another way to reach the roof without any stars whatsoever…



Deus Ex, Ion Storm (PC)

In a nod to a similarly conspiracy-oriented narrative work, *Deus Ex* features a clever egg paying homage to 'The Matrix'. With cheats enabled – and, importantly, with a game loaded – it can be found by visiting the Credits screen and typing 'thereisnospoon.' There truly isn't, as the *Deus Ex* engine attempts a worthy recreation of the 'Matrix code' special effect from the movie's denouement.

Indiana Jones and the Infernal



Machine, LucasArts (PC, N64 – 'Close Encounters' egg only)

LucasArts has an obvious penchant for countless references and pleasing, well-worked Easter eggs, which are arguably worthy of a feature in their own right. In the PC version of *IJATIM*, level 16 contains a secret exit that leads to the *Monkey Island* world, with Indy becoming a three-dimensional Guybrush Threepwood. In a bonus level, playing the famed five-note tune from 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind' opens a 'tribute' to Spielberg's epic.

B-17 Flying Fortress 2, Rage (PC)



Sometimes, the process of finding an egg can be more enjoyable than the actual message or visual effect it leads to – as was the case with *B-17 Flying Fortress 2*. If its disk is played as an audio CD, track 8 is a series of beeps. Members of the www.bombs-away.net forum – a popular haunt for players of Rage's sim – later discovered that this is actually Morse code, spelling L-Y-M-E-R-E-G-I-S. Flying to the English resort town reveals the egg pictured here.

Serious Sam, Croteam (PC)



Early in its development period, following an early playable demo and before most Websites and magazines caught on, Croteam's *Serious Sam* was championed by satirical site Old Man Murray and Ritual staffer Levelord. By way of thanks, they – along with Croteam staff – appear in a secret area found by backtracking from the start position. Some have opined that as shooting their oedematous heads increases your kill count, this can't be an egg. Sophistry, replies **Edge**: this is a worthy example of the art.

Black & White, Lionhead (PC)



The best egg in Lionhead's opus involves tracing an undocumented gesture with the mouse on its first island – it's approximately down, right, up, right, down. You are then informed that

Developer choice:

Charles Cecil, managing director, Revolution Software

1. Broken Sword II (PC)
Feed the goat some coal and you'll be rewarded with, well, something you don't hear every day.

2. GTAIII (PS2)
The sign 'off map' which exists only to reveal that you shouldn't be able to reach that part of the game still makes me smile.

3. Max Payne (PC)
The war against rats remains one of my favourite eggs – it's nice to see the inclusion of humour in what is otherwise an extremely bleak game.

4. MGS2 (PS2)
As much of the game is spent watching the Codec screens, the ability to lighten things during those long conversations up was welcome.

5. Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars (PC)
Reward the ghost in the underground station and you get to time warp back to Beneath A Steel Sky.

you have activated a hidden holy script. A traditional red telephone box appears on a far peninsula. Answering it causes five other boxes to appear, each containing various messages. The most interesting, though, is the one found in the second phone box: "Sorry, the boss removed the cheat."

Startopia, Mucky Foot (PC)



This remarkable egg was, apparently, developed by a Mucky Foot coder late one night, and can be accessed by holding F11 while typing 'CLIVEROOLZ'. Effectively, it changes the way *Startopia* presents visual information in such a manner as to roughly emulate the Spectrum's idiosyncratic display system – you can find a full explanation of how it works at www.muckyfoot.com. Think of it as a window, if you like, into a world that could have been were the Spectrum to be 32,000 times more powerful.

Max Payne, Remedy/3D Realms (PC, PS)



It was perhaps a given, with the involvement of *Duke Nukem 3D* creator 3D Realms, that *Max Payne* would contain a number of worthy eggs. One can be found in a secret area in the third chapter, just before the car park, where a radio can be used to hear messages from the developers. Later, a switch allows access to a hidden room containing S&M apparel and a TV that plays a spoof sci-fi sketch. Best of all, though, is *War of the rats* – a concealed sub-game in which Max participates in a gunfight between two rodent factions.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, 2015 (PC)



This egg rewards players who go beyond the call of duty and – despite seriously stacked odds – finish the first two levels of the fourth chapter on the highest difficulty setting while keeping every allied soldier alive. When players reach the Tiger tank having fulfilled this, they are given (in a departure to the game proper) 60 seconds to hide, before the view switches to Bazooka Med – a medic carrying a bazooka – as he hunts them down. *Allied Assault* also contains a hidden singleplayer map, called m4lo.bsp, which can only be accessed via the command console.

Halo, Bungie (Xbox)



What follows is not really a spoiler, but purists might want to skip this text. Moreover, it probably won't mean much to people who haven't played (and finished) *Halo* yet. Still, for the enjoyment of those who have: in the last minute of the game, you can take a game-losing detour to meet a non-aggressive Grunt who says: "Good thing that food nipple's waitin' for me on the starship, 'cause, man, have I worked up a big, grunty thirst!"

Developer choice:

Ray Muzyka, joint CEO, BioWare

1. Wizardry I and II (PC)
These games had a few secret rooms which you could reach only through teleportation spells or by blundering around in the 'dark areas'. Some of the rooms had interesting phrases on the walls that you could read, though it's hard to remember the specific text now.

2. System Shock (PC)
System Shock included quite a few simple videogames in the computer log – I think games like *Pong*, *Space Invaders* and *Frogger* were present.

3. MDK2 (PC)
When you looked at a particularly bright, coloured star through a telescope later in the game, the picture that appeared was of our third floor patio at BioWare, with the art director on the project surrounded by coneheads.

4. Baldur's Gate (PC)
Many of the pictures of NPCs who could join your party were portraits of BioWare staff painted with fantasy elements (armout, swords, etc). I myself was the basis for the portrait of the paladin Ajantis, while joint CEO Greg Zeschuk modelled for the thief Coran.

Metal Gear Solid 2, Konami (PS2)



Among the more entertaining secrets in Hideo Kojima's latest game is the hidden shaver which Raiden can find and later give to Snake. On the second time through the game the shaver lies to the right of the first room in Strut A Deep Sea Dock in the plant chapter. Just hang from the railing move right and climb up to find the razor. Give it to Snake and he will shave off his whiskers.

Mini eggs



Ridge Racer (PlayStation): Simply race to the first corner, turn around and speed right through the brick wall behind the starting grid to mirror the track.

Venus the Flytrap (Amiga): Contains the secret game *Chrome*.

Zub (Spectrum 128k): Has a secret shoot 'em up knocked together by coders Binary Design in an afternoon.

Zero Divide (PlayStation): Has a hidden version of the SNES game *Phalanx*.

Mega-lo-Mania (Mega Drive): Has a hidden version of *Sinistar*.

Lunar Jetman (Spectrum): Many much-discussed and long-remembered eggs are apocryphal: the trailer really was a hoax. Period.

Ballblazer Champions (PlayStation): Contains the original *Ballblazer*.

Day of the Tentacle (PC, Mac): Contains the full, playable version of its predecessor, the esteemed *Maniac Mansion*.

Defender 2000 (Jaguar): Entering 'Nolan' as a high score opens a new option: *Plasma Pong*.

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure (Mega Drive): Contained the original *2600 Pitfall* game, but only after 27 consecutive keypresses.

Final Fantasy VII (PlayStation/PC): In the highly unlikely event that your character's heath should fall (or rise) to 7777HP during a battle, the 'Lucky Sevens' effect begins, in which your character lands blows of 7777HP damage until the enemy in question falls – yes, even during the final battle with Sephiroth. Apparently, the vast majority of *FFVII* players didn't encounter this at all.

Combat Flight Simulator (PC): Above Amesbury in Wiltshire, England, you can find a flying pig. Amesbury, remember, is the location of Stonehenge.

Mercenary (Spectrum): This egg may have appeared on other formats, but it was possible to find a piece of cheese in the Spectrum version that, while it could be picked up and carried, had no apparent use. Accidentally pressing the 'board ship' key while stood above it, though, revealed its hidden power: it could fly. This proved very, very handy.

Blade Runner (PC): Entering the code 'Sitcom' enables a laugh track and audience applause to accompany events and conversational exchanges. It's eerily surreal.

Resident Evil 2 (PlayStation): In the police chief's office, search his desk 50 times, ignoring the message that appears. Eventually, you will find a roll of film. Developed in the darkroom visited later, this rewards you with a picture of Rebecca from the first *Resident Evil* in what is apparently a basketball outfit.

Dark Forces 2: Jedi Knight (PC): Steve Purcell's Max – of *Sam and Max* fame, obviously – is hidden in level 5. Free him, and he embarks upon a characteristically murderous rampage.

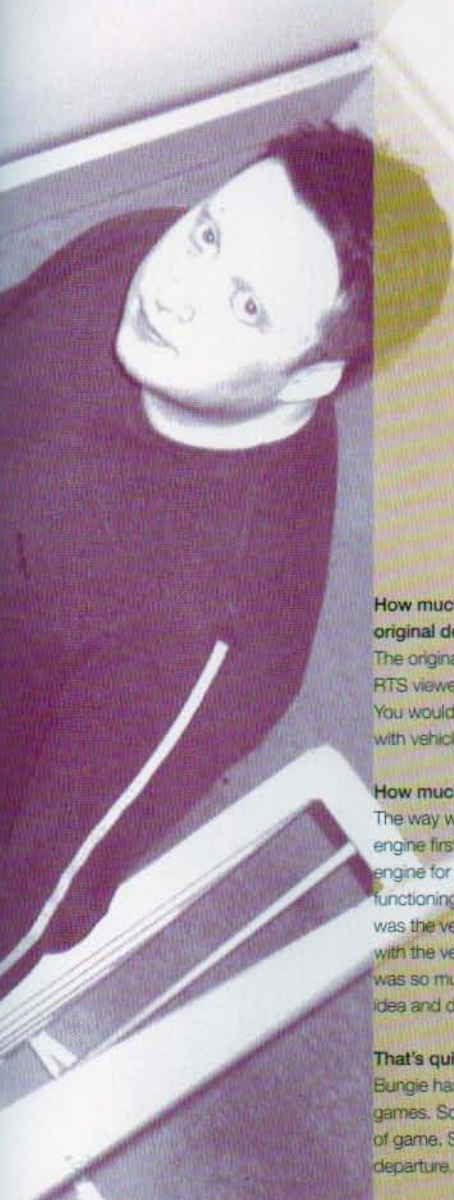


Halo there

Getting your break in the industry can be a matter of luck, hard slog or sheer dogged persistence. For **Jaime Griesemer** his rise up the ranks at Bungie owed a lot to all three. After designing a *Myth* news Website at college the company took him on as a beta tester for *Myth II*, but he was soon designing multiplayer maps in his own time. *Myth II* eventually shipped and Bungie didn't require testers any more. "But I kept coming into work anyway, so they put me to work on other projects." *Halo* came next. The project was so labour intensive that Bungie required every bit of help they could get. Griesemer was soon involved with every design decision and provided the fresh perspective necessary to bring the FPS up to date for the 21st century, making it one of the greatest videogame experiences of modern times. (Warning: contains slight final level spoiler.)



Audience with



How much did *Halo* change from the original design brief?
The original plan was for the game to be an RTS viewed from an overhead perspective. You would command an entire army of troops with vehicles and aircraft but in 3D.

How much of that was coded?
The way we work at Bungie is to create the engine first. We had been working on the engine for some time till it was fully functioning. One of the features of that engine was the vehicles in there. So we got to playing with the vehicles in firstperson mode and it was so much fun that we scrapped the RTS idea and decided to make it an action game.

That's quite a big reversal.
Bungie has made both RTS games and FPS games. So we have experience with that type of game. So it wasn't too much of a departure.

***Halo* really pushes the boundaries of the FPS game. What were the aspects you were most keen on implementing to make it stand out from the rest?**
We have this design philosophy which focuses on giving gamers the feeling that they are like a commando. And so everything in *Halo* is designed to enhance this sensation. Anything from the enemy AI to the ability you have in the game to throw grenades with the trigger button.

The AI seemed very sophisticated. Could you describe how you managed to make the behaviour of the aliens so life-like?
When we first started out with the AI we had a choice between making an AI where we have lots of unique events and almost completely rely on heavy scripting and planning out every single encounter. Or going with something which has lots of different behaviours but those behaviours would combine in a more emergent fashion. A lot of games are done with heavy scripting and they are done successfully but you always feel a little like you are watching a movie or playing through a game scenario. You don't really feel like you are participating. In order to make the player feel like a commando we developed an AI that would react to him in believable ways and create interesting situations by itself. We decided not to have an AI that cheated. The AI in *Halo* doesn't know anything magically. It can only see you if it has a line of sight to you and it only knows where you are if it can see you or hear you. It has limited ranges on its vision and sound. It's very realistic.

There's certainly something very spontaneous about the AI.
Yes, that means that you can fool the AI. Which is one of the things which we really wanted to emphasise in the game. A lot of times you'll see AI that it's fun to fight against but it doesn't feel realistic because you can never fool it. Whereas with our AI you can sometimes peak around a corner and you can surprise it.

"The original plan was for the game to be an RTS viewed from an overhead perspective. You would command an entire army of troops"

When you were developing and testing the game did the AI surprise you at any point?
There was a point where Chris Butcher, who was our AI programmer, started working full time on just adding unique behaviours. So every once in a while you'd get a new build and you'd play through an encounter that you'd already played dozens of times before and suddenly the AI would do something completely different. I remember the first time a Grunt threw a grenade at me and I was completely not expecting it and he got me right in the forehead. So I ran off for a minute before I exploded. There was also a real funny moment when we got the code working where Grunts panicked if you killed a leader. So I went into a room and everybody in the room just started running for the doors. That was also a great moment.

What were the main challenges of creating *Halo* in terms of level design?
Exteriors are very hard because you can't really limit what the player is able to do. So, you have to take into account all the different actions that he might try. We weren't able to do as many exteriors as interiors for this reason.

What specific problems does an exterior level pose?
One of the things *Halo* does really well is let you fight in cover. Aliens can expose you to fire and then take cover, especially if they are injured. At least they will take cover when their shields go down. Outside you don't have as much cover and the cover you do have tends to be rocks and trees which are pretty easy to flank and circle around. We spent a lot of time placing the scenery so that the AI could retreat and still be effective.

What is your favourite aspect of *Halo*?
I think the feature I enjoyed the most throughout the project was the cooperative play. We made the choice very early that we were going to leave ourselves the option of adding co-op. We avoided a lot of scripting to allow us to do that. Towards the end when we got co-op working it was just so much fun. Our AI is really fun – to catch Grunts in crossfires and have one person distract a Hunter while another one tries to shoot him in his weak spot.

The marine AI was impressive as well. Is there anything which stands out for you in terms of their behaviour?
When we were preparing for Gamestock we were making a couple of levels for people to play through. One of the first encounters was on Silent Cartographer where all the marines are charging up the beach with you and it feels like a really hectic battle. I got that working at two in the morning just a few days before Gamestock and I was sitting there playing through it and I just ran through the offices getting everyone else that was still around to play it too. That was a lot of fun. At that point we had just added the marine dialogue so they were talking constantly and making all these funny remarks.

Could you reveal any of those?
No, no, I would rather not.

Were you ever tempted to use a quicksave function in the game?
Even when we were on the PC we were trying to find an alternative to the quicksave because all that encourages you to do is to make levels too hard or have surprises that automatically kill the player. We wanted people to play with a totally different mentality. We wanted to have the security of quicksaves and knowing you weren't going to lose a lot of time and automate that. So we came up with the checkpoint system which we have actually used before. So there is never a break in the game. We have heard that people play for seven or eight hours solid and not even notice that the time is going by. That's because you are immediately thrown back into the action.

"There is never a break in the game. We have heard that people play the game for seven or eight hours solid and not even notice that the time is going by"

How many marine dialogue recordings are there in *Halo*?
There are thousands. A lot of time there are similar phrases only with different inflections and intonations and different voices. Just so that you very rarely hear repetition. I know that every once in a while I feel they are in your mind.

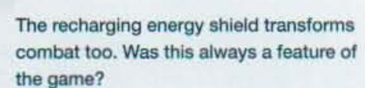
Which lines stand out for you?
When one of the marines panics and starts to run away, the sarge will turn to him and say, "Hey man, you forgot your purse." There are also some rather vulgar lines that we ended up cutting.

Why were there no bots in the game?
Bots were tough. Our AI is really good for singleplayer scenarios where the player is destined to overcome enemies. They're fun to fight for short periods of time in groups but they are not really good at analysing really large situations and being good opponents for extended periods of time. It would have taken a significant amount of effort to add bots to the game. We decide to spend that effort in other places like being able to fly the Banshee.

Why did you go for the thirdperson view from the vehicles?
When you are in a fast moving vehicle you need a lot of peripheral awareness. And thirdperson gives you that. We also found that we wanted people to see the vehicles and the cool animations when the guys weave when the vehicle turns.

Being able to fly vehicles and shoot down Banshees must have been a really ambitious feat to programme. Did you plan that right from the beginning of the game?
We really focused on completely integrating the vehicles in to the rest of the game. A lot of times when you get a vehicle in a firstperson shooter it's for a special 30-second period while you have that vehicle and then they make you get out. It's not seamlessly conveyed. We wanted to completely shove all those elements into one system and that really meant that you'd be able to fight those vehicles on foot and commandeer them in lots of different ways.

The decision to allow the player to carry only two weapons really changes the way you approach the game as a player.
Sure, the only two weapons thing may seem like a trivial decision. The reason we did it was that lots of weapons are being dropped by the characters. We wanted to give the player a good reason to pick up those weapons. Only carrying two seemed like the best way to do that. One of the other reasons we did it was that a lot of times you would just always have the perfect weapon for the situation at hand. We wanted to make it so the player didn't always have the perfect tools for the job and had to improvise and attack things in different ways. If you have always got the rocket launcher then you never come up with the idea of shooting the tank in its weak spots or setting up an ambush with grenades because you always have the rocket launcher.



The recharging energy shield transforms combat too. Was this always a feature of the game?

We had the recharging shield for a long time going right back to the very early stages of development. We were very tired of the traditional health cycle in a videogame where you start the level with full health then ten minutes later you are down to low health and you find a health pack and you are back up to full health a few minutes after that. The recharging shield means you don't have to play perfectly. It gives you a little latitude in taking some damage but then it recharges so you are not taking permanent damage. In some ways it made the game a lot more tense. An enemy can kill you really quickly if you get caught out of cover, especially on the higher difficulty levels. We wanted to give the player that terror of being out of cover but still give them the opportunity to fight thousands of enemies over the course of the game.

Why are those weapons so good on Legendary?

The overcharge Covenant pistol is very effective at taking down Jackal shields. And then the pistol does a lot of damage and it does headshots. So a lot of times in Legendary you'll use an overcharge flash to knock down an elite shield and then shoot him in the head with a human pistol and take him down very quickly. That's one of the best tactics to use on Legendary.

Sometimes when you restart from a save point the aliens are in different places. How random is their placement?

There's a little bit of randomness to the their initial placement but most of the unpredictability is a result of our AI making different decisions and approaching things using different tactics. So if you change your tactics, the AI will change in order to compensate.

"We wanted to make it so the player didn't always have the perfect tools for the job and had to improvise and attack things in different ways"

There are a lot of subtleties in the game, which are not immediately obvious the first time you play through.

Sure, one of the things people don't realise is that if you are moving very quickly and you do a mêlée attack it does a lot more damage. You will have somebody charging over an open field at you and right before he gets to you he jumps and then mêlée attacks you so he does lots more damage. That's a really interesting thing to play with once you know its there. One of the other clichés that we tried to break away from was incrementally better weapons. All of our weapons tend to be equally useful, just in different circumstances. We wanted to get people to exchange their weapons and spend a lot of time figuring out which weapons are going to be ideal for the next situation. So we had to balance them. It's odd, because it turns out that the human pistol and the covenant pistol are two of the best weapons in the game, especially on Legendary. A lot of people don't realise that and think it's just a pistol that's expendable.

How much is *Halo* getting out of the Xbox? Do you think the console has a lot more to give?

Halo was done on hardware that was not final and was not as powerful as the final shipping hardware. Also you find in any console's life that the games which are created later on take more advantage of the tweaks and gimmicks you can get in the hardware and use it a lot more efficiently. We were somewhat familiar with the hardware because it was based on PC architecture. But we are learning things which are pushing us well beyond where *Halo* was.

The final level of the game goes against the traditional boss encounter. What gave you the inspiration to do that?

Halo isn't really about giant boss monsters and like you say that's been done to death. We were looking for something different to do and Eric Arroyo, one of our artists, is a big fan of racing games. He made an insane track to drive the Warthog on and it was a lot of fun so we incorporated it into our last level. A lot of our level design works that way, we just experiment and work out what's fun.

What's happening with *Halo* in terms of making it broadband?

Future Bungie games will definitely be taking advantage of the online capabilities of Xbox. That's really where the future is and that's what we are really excited about doing.

There are already people playing *Halo* online through Linux. How do you feel about that?

I think that's great. Bungie fans have always made mods and entire levels to add into Bungie games. So I think that kind of stuff is great.

What's happening in terms of *Halo 2* and the PC version we keep hearing about?

You know you're going to get the typical "We can't make any announcements about that".

We have to ask the question.

You are required to ask the question and I'm required to give you the non-answer.



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's PC is an Intel 1.7Ghz / 1 Gig RAM / GeForce 3, kindly provided by **iwantitnow.co.uk**

Edge's most played

Super Mario 64
Blurred textures, a poor draw distance, and origami object models, but the actual game hasn't aged one bit. Why not revisit while you're waiting for *Sunshine*?


(Nintendo 64) Nintendo

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty
For all its problems – protracted cut-scenes, twitchy controls and numerous boss battles – *MGS2* proves to be utterly absorbing, when you actually get to play.


(PlayStation2) Konami

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance
Given the relative brevity of the singleplayer game it's easy to reach the end. But this is one of those games that's worth returning to again and again.


(PlayStation2) Interplay

Breath of Fire
Why don't they make games like this any more? Lovingly handcrafted, with a judicious sense of progress, and deliciously interlocking play mechanics.


(Game Boy Advance) Ubi Soft

testscreen

The world's most respected videogame reviews

The software slump

April is the cruellest month...

Magazine psychology dictates that the strength of an issue is, in the mind of the reader, directly proportional to the quality of games within. If it's correct, that means this will be viewed as the worst issue for some considerable length of time. It has not been a good month.

The post-Christmas lull is always tough, but this year it's been skewed by both international console releases. As **Edge** writes this we're in PAL dead-time, just before Xbox hits Europe and the GC starts being marketed for real. That, and the fact that we've been on such a numerical high recently, makes the scoring comedown even harder to take.

Which isn't to say this issue hasn't been a victim of circumstance. *Dungeon Siege* slipped to a week past deadline, and *Jedi Knight II* (and *Jedi Starfighter*) fell victim to LucasArts' stringent review code policies. **Edge**'s Japanese Xbox did make it in time for the close of the issue, but without the games: *Nezmix* and *Airforce Delta* were subject to an unfortunate stop-off in customs. *Animal Leader* and *Smashing Drive* were in the same package. All should appear in **E**110.

So what did make it in? Well, there's *State of Emergency*, the smash hit that sold on the back of puerile hype and conscienceless marketing to an easily-fooled audience who, it's hoped, won't be as easily fooled next time. They wanted *GTAIV*; they got *Smash TV* with all the fun taken out. It is, allegedly, challenging *Final Fantasy VII* for the most returned game in shops nationwide, albeit for entirely different reasons. That was a game the press sold to a disinterested public; this is one they couldn't/didn't warn them away from.

And then there's *Wreckless*, a game whose beauty is only matched by its vacant, baseless hype, and the raw imbecility of its substance. *Nightcaster*, *Blood Wake*, and *TransWorld Surf* are more games that weigh in favour of the Xbox haters, but Cube owners hardly have reason to be smug. The only reason their games aren't receiving a critical beating this month is that the things on offer are mediocre ports 'n' sports.

But bad games don't mean bad reviews. And while some of the criticism might make painful reading this month, **Edge** isn't here to tell you everything's going to be okay. Besides, there's one advantage of such a hollow, disheartening month. The only way forward is up.


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Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Bunkasha** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US/UK)**





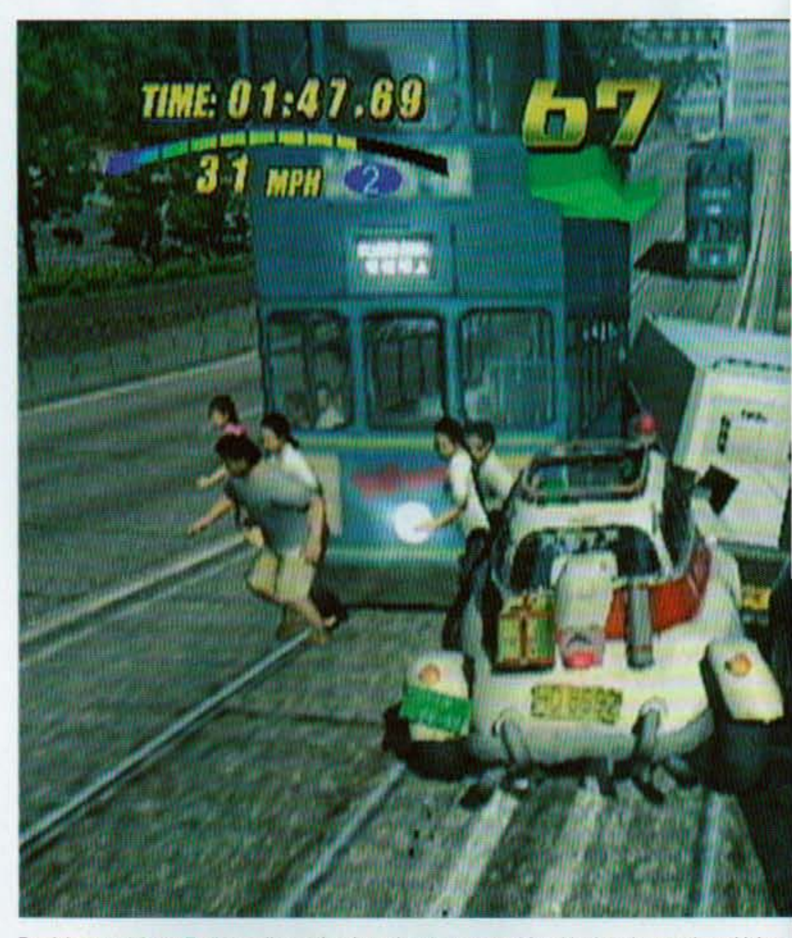


The filters in replay mode make the stunning visuals even more impressive

You could watch the replay mode for hours. It's absolutely staggering. Most game replays are facile, pointless, but here, as the scenery spins and bounces and drops, and sparks fly, and the engine applies filter after spectacular filter, and the cameras whirl and cut and zoom and pan and your car skids through another fence and the driver grips the roof and the Dim Sum stands explode and… you could watch it for hours. You get lost.

A 20-mission car chase across a washed-out pastel cityscape, lost is how you'll spend a good deal of your time with Activision's *Wreckless*, a game most easily described as a cross between *Destruction Derby* and *Crazy Taxi*'s Box/Pyramid minigames. As gorgeous as the overblown wood/metal carnage is, it also plays a substantial part in obscuring the tightly wound city's turnings and entrances. The graphical splendour and washed-out colour scheme isn't entirely to blame, though: a clumsy, outsized map, which has to be there because the directional arrow is so ineffective, also crowds out the playscreen.

Luckily, the map is the only thing the player has to concentrate on, because there is no complexity here. You press accelerate to move faster, and brake to slow down. You don't stop much, though, because that's the point: you're being reckless, as the title implies, crashing through everything until you hit a part of the scenery that the game declares immovable and your car buckles and you coo at the bump mapping and kinetic destruction and spin round and head off again. It's a lot of fun, for a while, and then it gets boring, and you go in search of the game proper.



Reminiscent of *Crazy Taxi*'s tramline antics, here there's no reward for skipping close to the vehicles. Something as simple as that might have increased the adrenaline; as it is, it's beautiful, but pointless

At its best, Wreckless is a pleasant skid through some remarkable eye candy. At its worst, it's nothing more than a kaleidoscope



One uninspired mission sees you driving along a winding ledge, trying to get to the end before the time runs out

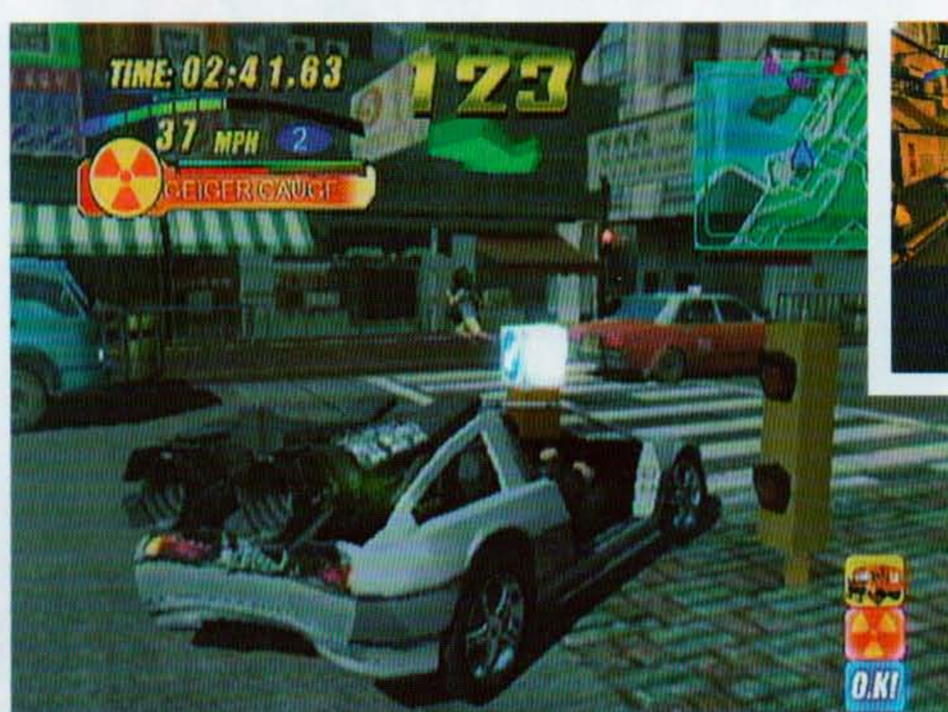
Missions are simple in nature, crude in execution. Some involve destroying enemy cars, only possible via a stop-start mechanic of charging at them from a distance, and then waiting for them to move away again. Others include *Crazy Taxi*-style fetch this/go there combinations, where destinations are frustratingly hidden behind destructible walls or blind corners – level design which, when combined with the restrictive time limits, means all but the most fortunate players spend multiple instant restarts memorising the locations of each mission-critical object. Then there are the radar-based 'locate and destroy' objectives, an exercise in trial-and-error stupidity, and the crash-into-things-for-points missions, and the frustrating but epic composites.

Most of the missions are framed by time limits that are either set too loosely or are much too harsh. Crucially, this is indicative of the lack of care taken. It reinforces the feeling that *Wreckless* has barely been playtested, or that it's had no more consideration at design than someone placing random mission ideas inside arbitrary difficulty settings. It lacks the rigidity of *Burnout* or the satisfying freeform nature of *Crazy Taxi*, never encouraging exploration, providing opportunity for strategy, or rewarding improvisation. At its best, it's a pleasant skid through some remarkable eye candy. At its worst, it's nothing more than a kaleidoscope.

Or, to put it another way, it's a tech demo: a spectacular engine seeking a worthy design document. It's exactly the sort of thing that should be on Xbox demo pods, because it provides a clear example of how much graphical power the box really has, in the context of a one-joke game that's fun for five minutes, but appears to have been conceptualised by an eight-year-old. Big cars smash. Big cars smash again. Take pleasure in the aesthetic destruction, and then walk away from the pod without any inclination to purchase. You could watch the replays for hours, but actually play *Wreckless* for any length of time and you'll see how charmless it really is.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









The damage your car suffers is substantially more realistic than *Project Gotham*'s limited scratches, but it fails to improve the gameplay









Humans dodge your car effectively, diving out of the way or flattening themselves against walls. Collide with another vehicle, and the occupants will bail out immediately



Sudden impact

Wreckless' unspectacular game mechanics are particularly transparent when it comes to destroying enemy cars. Collide with them, and a block will drop from their energy bar. Hit them more firmly, and perhaps two blocks will go. This is as complex as it gets: the initial impact between player vehicle and computer vehicle is the only damage registered, meaning the game doesn't afford the opportunity for subtler, more rewarding tactics. Plan on nudging a Yakuza car into the path of an oncoming cement mixer, for example, and your only reward will be watching the spectacular collision that follows, with your foe emerging remarkably unscathed.

Blood Wake

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Stormfront Studios** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E99**

Simplicity is a virtue in a videogame, unless it's an excuse for producing a boring experience. The concept behind *Blood Wake* is sound – one of gang warfare on the high seas – but its execution is bland.

Blood Wake retains all the typically bullish trademarks and empty posturing of a US-developed videogame aimed at the teen market. In terms of presentation, for example, there's a dull techno-rock soundtrack and a surf-bum-made-hitster lead character that ensures the player will wince their way through cut-scenes. It's a development process that has concentrated on delivering half-hearted USPs (nice water, 'stunning' AI) instead of the punchy, visceral play that a fun-with-guns title such as this should convey.

Tasks follow a similar vein to *Driver* or *Smuggler's Run*. Sometimes playing fetch, sometimes beating the clock but always shooting at the paltry enemies that cross your vessel. It's here, in combat, that a title such as *Blood Wake* should be at its most rewarding, but limp and unsubtle weapons produce nothing in the way of satisfaction. There's little control afforded to the player too, meaning that conflicts can either be resolved with middle-distance pot shots or become reduced to an embarrassing game of tail-chasing, where boats pursue one another around in a circular stalemate.

In fact, the handling is just plain wrong at times. When your craft comes to near-rest, the controls suddenly reverse, with left becoming right and vice versa. Deft manoeuvring, or even passable piloting, is unfeasible as you try and pre-empt this absurd flip of direction.

As the waters get choppier, it makes for slightly more impressive fluid dynamics – breaks crash and swirl in a convincing manner – but further increases the caprice of the handling. Torpedoes, along with any sense of skill, simply become swallowed up by the waves. Place these faults in parallel, and it's too easy to fall foul of the few missiles that are needed to shatter your vehicle.

There's definite potential here for a game based on glib, unabashed fun and the Pacific-Vietnam styled setting could make for a far more intriguing storyline. *Blood Wake* occasionally provides glimpses of how its duller aspects could be buffed into something that truly sparkles but, lacking in any outstanding features whatsoever, it never really leaves the port.

Edge rating: Four out of ten













Extra time

Taking its cue from titles such as *TimeSplitters*, almost every level completed unlocks some kind of extra craft, multiplayer mode or battle arena. However, since the game itself is so ineffectual, these bonuses count for little; there's no subtlety to explore within these modifications. Take the battle modes, for example. Whether you're fighting against the acceptable AI bots or with human cohorts, there's little variety in the action as it always reduces to an overly simplistic stand-off.

The water effects are attractive, but there's little joy in admiring them when you're experiencing a game as empty and repetitive as *Blood Wake*





***Blood Wake*'s premise may well be flawed: frantic pirate boat fights might sound fun on paper, but the problem with water is that there's rarely anywhere to hide, meaning combat inevitably lacks subtlety**

Nightcaster: Defeat the Darkness

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **VR1 Entertainment** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**






Staggeringly, it takes so long to pause the game to reach the, admittedly pretty, menus that it's possible for your character to die in the process



Lurid rings

Spell School Changers are glowing rings that allow your character to specialise in a particular school of magic at the expense of the other three. The developer could have used this conceit to vary the pace and progress of the game's otherwise fairly linear levels. The rings could have been made difficult to get to, but subsequently advantageous, for example. Instead, should you find such a ring, the chances are that it's a set-up. Step into a Fire ring and it's almost certain that you'll shortly be beset by Fire creatures, against which your arsenal has now been weakened. And this, frankly, is sloppy design.






It's not a particularly impressive game to look at. There is an over-the-shoulder view that gives a better account of the surroundings, but in the interests of gameplay, this distant, overhead view is more useful

Nightcaster initially appears to be another standard RPG but in reality it's a failed exercise in interface innovation. It's also definitive proof that the Xbox hard drive doesn't, in contrast to mainstream press reports, eliminate loading times. The young champion's movements are effected with the left analogue stick, while the right analogue stick manoeuvres a magical orb, which is used to target spells against oncoming beasties. Unfortunately, though it's a cute idea, this interface never really becomes instinctive, and it's let down by an erratic camera and a catalogue of design disasters.

Although it isn't an RPG, the game still features a substandard narrative – told unnecessarily in sub-Pam Ayers rhyme and – building on the advances made by *Obi-Wan* – with voice acting that's pitched somewhere between 'The Nessies' and Scottie out of 'Star Trek'. Here's an example, drawn at random: "But as the darkness twists with rage/The chosen one shall turn the page." It might not be poet laureate stuff, but it's also clear that very little attempt has been made to integrate this backstory with the game's play mechanics. Consequently, the game's environments are superfluously dotted with vast numbers of meaningless story scrolls and badly voice-acted NPCs.

Indeed superfluity proves a recurring theme. Despite the number of spells that have been included in the game there is little strategic variation between them. And even though four schools of magic should in theory instigate some kind of interplay with enemy creatures of opposing schools, in practice every combat encounter devolves into an tediously iterative fighting retreat, whatever the enemy. And then there's the camera. Although there is an over-the-shoulder cam mode, this proves redundant compared to the more useful overhead view – which itself is stymied by a ponderous, myopic, camera. Matters aren't helped when your targeting orb gets stuck behind an obstacle of some sort, or when enemies fade into the murky background.

Which hardly alleviates overwhelmingly linear levels, or the timid difficulty level. Boss encounters and beastie hotspots prove to be very time consuming, but there is never any real sense of threat or danger. Like *Azurik* before it, *Nightcaster* is tedious, lengthy and ultimately unedifying. And not very welcome on Xbox.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Global Ops

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **Crave Entertainment** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Counter-Strike's popularity has led to a glut of team-based real-world combat games based on all the major PC firstperson shooters. Most of these are simply free modifications, but others have become full-blown retail products like *Global Ops*, *Team Factor* or the forthcoming singleplayer version of *Counter-Strike*, *Condition Zero*.

The problem for *Global Ops* is the quality of its rivals. *Counter-Strike* has had the benefit of years of polish and lashings of Valve's own cash and *Condition Zero* looks as though it will be the first game to successfully implement offline play. It boasts new AI-controlled bots to take the role of human players in offline play, a vital feature if it is to justify itself as a paid-for product rather than the free online game.

Global Ops boasts such a feature too, but it doesn't manage to create a worthy singleplayer experience, the bots are too imprecise and the maps too weak. Offline play can only be regarded as a training ground, allowing players to practise with maps and weapons without having to spend time online playing real people.

It's genuine teamplay that makes *Global Ops* particularly exciting. The combat is realistically paced, with just a few bullets putting you on the floor, writhing in agony until healed by a medic or allowed to respawn in a reinforcement cycle. Abilities and equipment are dictated by your class, of which the medic is the most significant, allowing other players to be healed in the field. It's a gun fetishist's delight with dozens of weapons all modelled to a satisfyingly weighty degree – the Commando and the Heavy Weapons trooper classes getting the pick of the big guns.

The objective-based maps work in very much the same way as in *Counter-Strike*, with terrorists and counter-terrorists battling it out to protect hostages, plant bombs or capture military objectives. Kills bring in the money that allows players to invest in better weaponry.

Global Ops is generally well engineered and well thought out, despite the Lithtech engine leading to some ugly maps. The PC online hardcore will no doubt create a persistent community around the game, but it remains too soulless and too bland to make an impact on a genre that will continue to be dominated by free games for some time to come.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

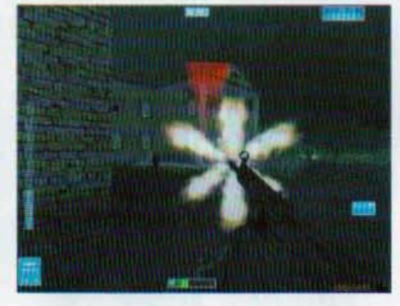




Call me a chopper

Death doesn't necessarily mean you're stuck in a ghost mode – although you can choose to spectate – you're allowed to wait for a medic to heal you (you can't finish off prone players), or you can enter a reinforcement cycle that spawns players every 40 seconds. This allows you to re-equip and to take a look at your sullen looking mates in the back of a truck or helicopter. It's worth browsing the weapon lists extensively because there's an obscene number of grenades, pistols, machine guns and rifles to choose from.





As with all objective-based team games there are bottlenecks on the maps where action will take place, knowing these brings success







All the weapons are beautifully modelled and reproduce the feel of shock and movement of their recoil brilliantly. No rocket launchers here though, the demolition guy relies on a single-shot grenade instead

State of Emergency

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Rockstar Games** Developer: **Vis Interactive** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

The bad news is that, despite the obvious connections, *State of Emergency* is no successor to *GTAIII* – not the second fix of clever mayhem some Liberty City regulars had expected. The good news is that it has fallen flat on its other pre-release promise of creating an experience uneasily close to the true-life urban eruptions of recent years.

It may be billed as a 'riot sim', but rather than exploiting memories of anti-capitalist unrest in Genoa or looting in LA, *SoE* evokes nothing so much as also-rans such as Sega's 32bit title *Dynamite Deka* and coin-op *Die Hard Arcade*. It's bigger than they were, and far busier, but the basic formula remains: roam around punching people, find a gun, run around shooting people, locate the heavy weaponry, blow stuff up, throw novelty items (including victims' limbs) for variety, and don't expect high-precision environment physics or camera behaviour. When it sticks to those limits, *SoE* is a short, sharp, dumb shot of videogame fun. When it doesn't, it's a mess.

That mess has a name – Revolution mode – and it's home to the game's spectacular-sounding basic tally of 175 missions. It's 2035, the world has been conquered by capitalism, and an eventual choice of five new recruits to the rebellion is selected and sent to complete very short and very repetitive anti-authority tasks. They're also very poorly-implemented and hold-ups en route to their mercifully swift completion are more likely to result from camera antics and cheap AI stunts than any more satisfying challenge. With a few exceptions, the much-vaunted crowds are window dressing – a metaphor for a videogame distinguished only by the marketing ingenuity behind it.

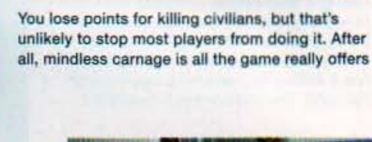
Chaos mode houses the game's arcade-style modes, including the confusingly-titled 'Kaos mode', in which high-scores, time-sensitive goals and temporary power-ups combine to create some momentum and sense of free-firing abandon. Following multipliers and keeping an eye on developments makes for a slicker, more pacy experience – but an equally short-lived one.

The real crime is that *SoE* has no charisma and nothing new to offer. It's too bland and too sloppy to offend anyone, and too limited to hold much appeal after a day's play. Want to avoid a future where cynical conglomerates force rubbish products onto an unthinking society? Start by not buying *State of Emergency*.

Edge rating: Four out of ten



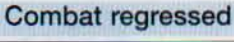




You lose points for killing civilians, but that's unlikely to stop most players from doing it. After all, mindless carnage is all the game really offers



Those who've found Rockstar/Take 2's latest release in poor taste might want to explain why *State of Emergency*'s cartoon violence is any more morally reprehensible than *GTAIII*'s take on crime. Regardless, it's certainly a much worse game



Combat regressed

The appeal of hand-to-hand combat fades quickly, but there are favourites including flame throwers and AK-47s to fall back on. These are especially useful in Kaos mode, where making the most of temporary multipliers for smashing windows and blowing up cars can mean the difference between game over and continue.

The game's four main levels – Mall, East Side, Chinatown and Corporation Central – are alive with looters, bombers, security forces and the like, but the mass of bodies are just indistinguishable cut-outs. This confusion, as well the twists and turns of the environments themselves, is negotiated via a scrappy arrow and map system. The level of activity is impressive, but little else about the visuals is – there's none of the character of comparable cartoon cities in *GTAIII* or *Crazy Taxi*.

Combat comprises much of the game and is unashamedly basic. Hand-to-hand fighting is a means to an end rather than a pleasure in itself. Perhaps inevitably, more care appears to have been lavished on the animation for stomping on prone victims than the moves list.

Star Trek: Bridge Commander

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **Totally Games** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**









As weapons fire, phaser-banks deplete, forcing a slow-circling motion to allow time to recharge (above). Time this circling to match your foe's weakened shields, and victory is secured. Each of the ship's crew has a defined and recognisable character (far right). The voice acting is excellent

While in recent years the results of the various 'Star Trek' franchises step over into the world of videogames has bettered from 'blighted', it still isn't completely in the realm of 'blessed'. The finest games – such as Raven's *Elite Force* – succeed by eschewing the majority of what the original matter holds so dear. 'Star Wars', being violent science-fantasy, translates well. 'Star Trek', being science fiction, generally fails.

Fortunately, Totally Games' attempt at the franchise is a step in a more authentic direction, as least at first. Initially, you're placed aboard the Captain's seat, ordering the manoeuvres of your vessel through interaction with its officers.

However, this is more of a training approach than a real play option – the further you progress, the more you find yourself taking direct tactical control over the action, virtually abandoning the 'commander' aspect of the title. Since it operates so well, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. While slow, the ships of *Bridge Commander* are complicated beasts, with the leisurely pace of combat leaving time for the considerable tactical depths to emerge. This is certainly the best 'Star Trek' game of recent years.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Laser Squad Nemesis

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Codo Games** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$15/six months** Release: **Out now**

The discussion of creator's rights is rarely applied to videogames. Perhaps with the legion of publisher horror stories that resonate around the FatBabies message boards, it should be more on developers' minds. Take, in this case, the Gollop brothers, who, having created one of the biggest franchises of the '90s in *X-Com*, started the new millennium adrift from a publisher while releases such as *X-Com Enforcer* profited from the franchise's smouldering coals.

However, they have come back with this, a return to the seminal 8bit tactical turn-based wargame, made it email only, and cut out the publisher side of things entirely. The fee allows six months of email play, and access to the planned improvements and additions to the game. Their servers collate the turns, which allows simultaneous acting out of orders, entirely rewarding the foresight of a player. While it lacks a singleplayer mode, what's here is honed, well balanced, painfully addictive and a noble addition to the line that runs all the way back to *Rebelstar Raiders* and *Chaos*.

Laser Squad is articulate and fast-paced. And from it, something more interesting may bloom. If you don't play, at least watch, wait and see.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Each character's orders are displayed through a series of thin lines, allowing complicated tactics to be coordinated and planned effectively (above). While the graphics are currently functional, upgrades to a full 3D system are planned for the future (left)

RalliSport Challenge

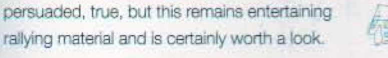
Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Digital Illusions** Price: **£45** Date: **Out now** Previously in **E**108

Somewhat predictably, little has changed since **Edge** saw *RalliSport* last month. This is both a good and a bad thing – while the game's strengths remain untouched, sadly, so do the elements that would have benefited from slight tweaking.

Taking those first: the car's behaviour (particularly in chase cam) is just too static thus shattering much of the rallying illusion; brake and throttle control feels overly lethargic (although selecting a manual gearbox tends to redeem matters a little); the AI is disappointing; and the handling dynamic is a touch too simplistic resulting in an experience that just fails to engage in the way that, say, *WRC* on the PS2 manages to.

Having said that, the game's structure is very good (the points system really encourages you to take risks in the hope of unlocking further events); the variety in terms of rallying categories is unrivalled; there's a fine sense of speed, and track design can often throw some surprises into your path (it's worth mentioning the pace notes tend to be pleasantly detailed at times).

Devoted *Colin McRae* fans are unlikely to be persuaded, true, but this remains entertaining rallying material and is certainly worth a look.



Edge rating: Six out of ten









Two and fourplayer games are not only fun but also technically impressive, with the Xbox seemingly happy to cope with the increased processing demands. Given the hardware, you'd expect it to look good but it's worth pointing out a pleasing amount of detail has gone into creating *RC*'s world (even roadside shrubs react to your vehicle), although the rain effect is disappointing (as is the lack of dynamic weather)

TransWorld Surf

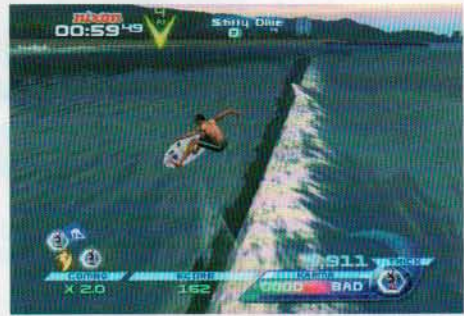
Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Atari** Developer: **Angel Studios** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**107



While some interesting ideas have made it into *TW Surf*, ultimately the approach undertaken by the developer has failed comprehensively. A little more time in the studio rather than trying to make the European Xbox launch might have helped







And so the search for sporting adrenaline, and *Tony Hawk's*-style cash cows, continues. Though after playing *TransWorld Surf*, it's perhaps easy to see why developers tend to stick to skate parks.

A standard, no-frills structure means a variety of objectives must be accomplished on each beach to progress to the next. Link a few tricks here, save a dolphin there, and your surfing career is assured.

Less certain is the amount of fun to be had from a title whose relatively original premise is what holds it back. Falling off the board results in either a tedious paddle back to a wave or a call to the local reef girl, a jetski rider who then escorts the player to a wave of their choosing. However, the device serves only to interrupt the game on an increasingly irritating basis.

Once on the waves, things aren't much better. An unintuitive control system means that performing tricks is not as satisfying or enjoyable as it should be, and a lack of feedback from the water renders executing combos guesswork. Those used to the smooth, intensive finger-workout provided by the more established extreme sports will be frustrated with the staccato non-action on offer here.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Bam! Entertainment** Developer: **Revolution Software** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E107**

Narrative is an oft-derided feature in videogames, so it is always refreshing to find a title that can captivate through plot alone. *Broken Sword*'s story trips along convincingly, revealing an imaginative interpretation of the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the Knights Templar. The characterisation shines next to most 128bit offerings and you won't find many games brave enough to juxtapose medieval history with amusing nob gags.

However, there is more to this GBA version than plot alone. The tired point-and-click interface has been transformed for the tiny screen. 'Hot-spots' reveal all the relevant locations to search and the puzzles remain logical throughout.

While it may offer cardigan and slippers entertainment, that's sometimes exactly what you want to zap the hours between airports. The gradual unravelling of the mystery is never frustrating and solutions to puzzles often arrive in moments of epiphany away from the game rather than during – surely the mark of logically constructed conundrums. Don't be put off by its old-skool dynamic, this makes for wonderfully satisfying entertainment.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









All the original PC locations have been beautifully recreated for this GBA version. The dialogue remains snappy throughout with characters often establishing themselves within a couple of sentences which is unusual for a videogame

Virtua Striker 3

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Amusement Vision** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**





The default configuration uses the analogue stick plus A (long pass), B (short pass) and X (shoot) buttons. Although it's entirely workable, the drastic variation in button sizes and shapes means it's rarely intuitive to switch between types of kick, and raises genuine questions about the versatility of the GameCube pad





Given the *Virtua Striker* series' effortless domination of the arcade football scene in recent years, Sega clearly wasn't prepared for the venom that greeted its first effort at a console conversion, 1999's Dreamcast release of *VS2*. This time, Amusement Vision promised home enhancements and to some extent, it's come good: the GC version adds analogue control, better response times, much improved passing, less stupid AI and a slightly calmer, more convincing pace. Nevertheless, it still resembles a side-scrolling beat 'em up with goalies as bosses, there is no way to dash or switch active players, no camera option beyond the default side view, and the referees still wave red cards at every opportunity.

Visually, the game impresses; player models are smooth and detailed and cast superb shadows across a range of lighting set-ups, replays are brilliantly stylised and the game's impressive selection of nearly-real stadia writhe with crowd movement and boast vivid turf textures. There's no fourplayer option, but two like-minded aficionados can have a riot with *VS3* – whether or not they can have a game of football with it, however, is another matter entirely.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Dead or Alive 3 (PAL)

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Tecmo (Team Ninja)** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**94, **E**103, **E**105









A full review of *DOA3* appears in E105, and the point of this update is exhibited above: PAL *DOA3* looks (and moves) every bit as sharp and fast as its NTSC counterpart

The Dreamcast's 60Hz legacy and Sony's impressive work on the PAL version of *Ico* has put pressure on Microsoft to get conversions right. But its hardware appears to have eliminated the chance of bordered heartbreak; gamers choose their preferred output, and the box produces a signal to suit.

Which is important in a fighting game, as those who've suffered a league of bad Capcom and Namco conversions know. This is fullscreen beauty: it's easy to be blinded by *DOA3*'s stunning visuals and animation, but it's just as easy to forget that both are – and always have been – an integral part of a fighting game's impact. Moves lock to opponents perfectly: boots thud against heads, which in turn crunch against the floor. It's beautifully coherent and tremendously rewarding.

European gamers also get new replay endings in the Time Attack and Tag Battle modes, 18 new outfits and around 50 new moves across the characters. All welcome improvements, but inconsequential when set against the death of the poor European conversion.

Those with 60Hz TVs will now receive a crisp PAL60 product, and those with 50Hz signals won't have to suffer sluggish combat either.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Genma Onimusha

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Just as Capcom prepares to release *Onimusha 2* on PS2, a remix of the original arrives on Xbox. The most fundamental change is the modification to the soul system. Invincibility souls appear during combat, and if Samanosuke manages to absorb five of them he'll become invincible for a short period of time. But enemies power up – glow red, and become faster, stronger and more aggressive – on consuming a single one, and so the game becomes much more difficult. Sometimes it adds a pleasant strategy to the combat, and other times it feels horrendously unbalanced.

The game suffers from Capcom's insistence on the traditional survival horror input method, the *Biohazard* creator eschewing analogue control for the digital forwards/backwards/rotate method. It was clumsy on the PS2, and it's made worse by the dreadful D-pad on the Xbox. Given that *Genma Onimusha* is harder than *Onimusha Warlords*, it's more frustrating than ever.

However, it's also bigger, and offers more reward for those prepared to play it through several times. It's what *Onimusha* would have been like with a few extra months of development, which is no bad thing. It's just not a truly great thing, either.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







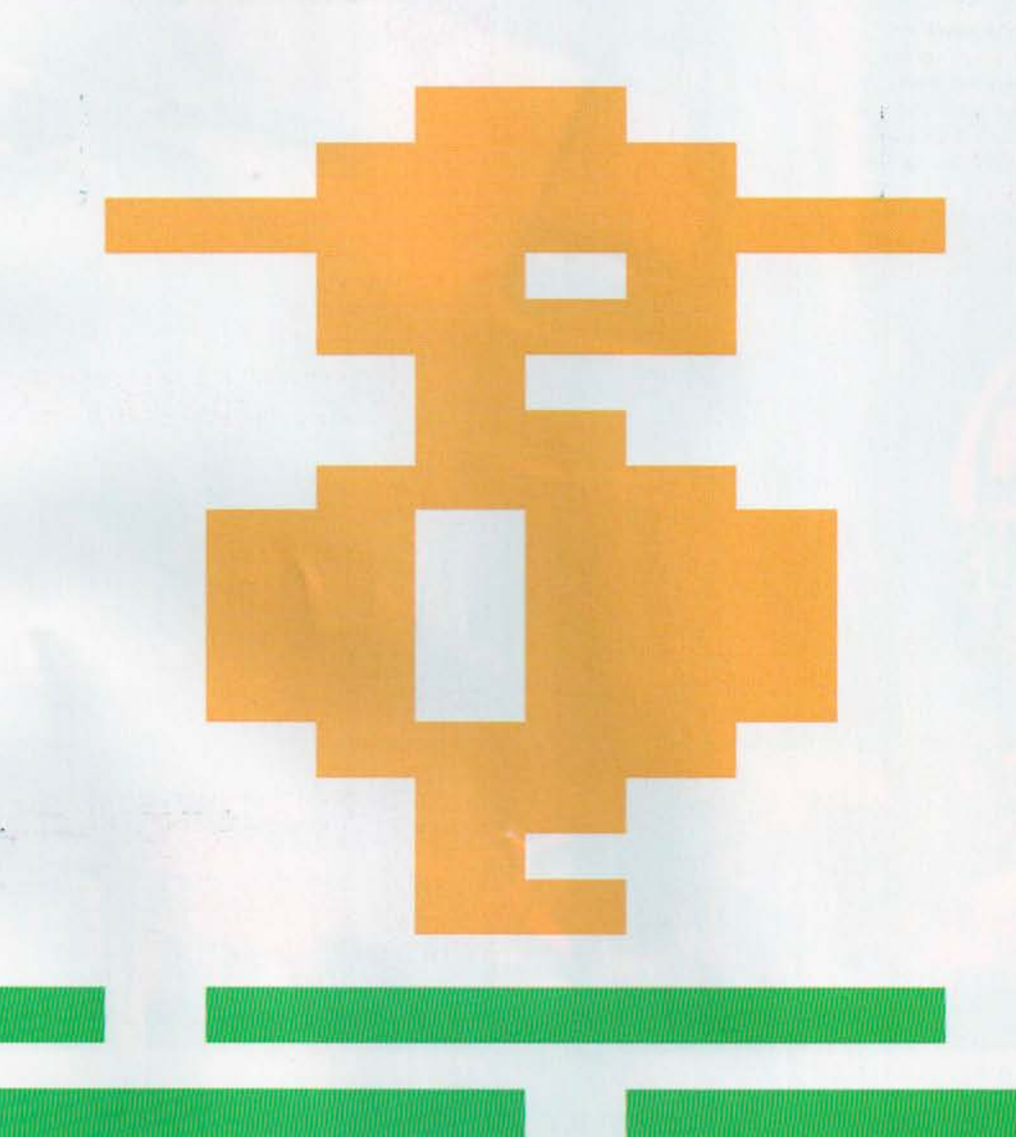


While the visuals appear to be slightly cleaner in the Xbox version, the extras – a couple of side quests and the new soul system – won't be enough of a purchasing incentive for owners of the PS2 original

The making of…

Chuckie Egg

Although Elite may have been the BBC Micro game of choice for computer science nerds, across the room another game was fast becoming the favourite for a whole generation





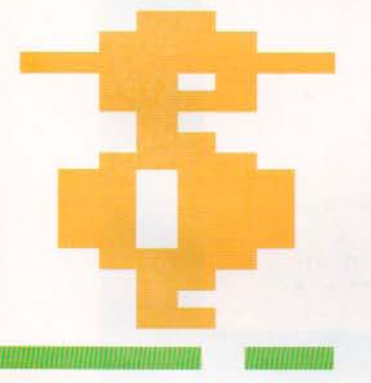
Shigeru Miyamoto clearly had no idea what he'd started. A videogame with a quest, clearly defined levels and a distinctive hero was never expected to sell well. But *Donkey Kong* went on to become one of the most iconic games in videogame history and spawn a generation of platformer clones. Most, of course, were shoddy facsimiles, but if one game took the formula and elevated it to new heights it was the humble Spectrum and BBC Micro classic, *Chuckie Egg*.

Format: **BBC Micro, Spectrum**
Publisher: **A&F Software**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1983**

Those who have never experienced the kinetic thrills of *Chuckie Egg* have missed a treat. While most 3D games still make players scream in frustration as they plummet from another 'greasy' ladder, *Chuckie Egg* perfected the deft platform to mid-ladder jump with some aplomb





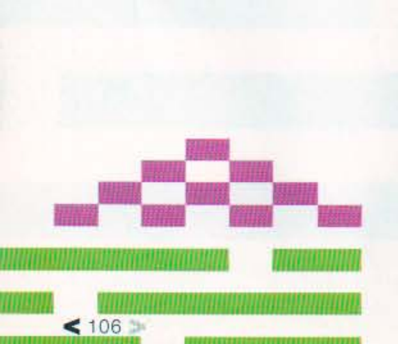


The game's creator, **Doug Anderson**, takes up the story, "It was actually an external guy called Nigel Alderton who came to us with a Spectrum program he'd done called *Eggy Kong*. It had one level and was very much based on *Donkey Kong*, except you ran around avoiding hens and collecting eggs. They were meant to be hens but they looked more like ostriches. It developed from there because I was really a BBC programmer at the time. I thought, I'll take his idea and work around it and he actually ended up writing the Spectrum one anyway. We worked on it as a team and there were a few people chipping in ideas."

Anderson had been trying to establish his own games company for two years when *Eggy Kong* came along. A&F Software was founded in 1981 with his partner Mike Fitzgerald ("We couldn't think of a more imaginative name for the company," admits Anderson) and Acorn Atom titles such as *Polecat* and *Early Warning* had failed to put the fledgling company on a secure footing. But the game that would eventually become *Chuckie Egg* changed all that. Developed in three months from a small one-level demo the game would eventually go on to every 8bit platform and become one of the most cherished titles of its generation – spawning several fan Websites in the process. For Anderson, the game's popularity is still something of a mystery. "It did surprise me. We didn't try to figure out why until a long time afterwards. It was because you could keep going maybe, I don't know. I obviously didn't plan to make it that way otherwise everyone would have used the same formula."

Although there were only eight screens and a rudimentary goal (get hen-house Harry to collect all the eggs under a certain time limit) the fact that the game looped around several times gave it a great deal of durability. "We knew we would run into trouble if we had more than eight levels. We thought that was enough really," explains Anderson. "It looped round and then there were more birds. The second time around the duck came out of the cage, it would dive-bomb you all the time. On the third time the hens walked at double speed and then on the fourth time, if you got that far, you got the fast hens and the duck. You could even go around another time. That gave you about 40 levels altogether. We didn't expect anyone to get that far because the time limit came down, too. There was no end screen, you just kept going and going. We expected people just to play until they got fed up with it, but people kept playing it and scoring millions. We were flabbergasted really."

Key to the game's success was its super-fast pace (for an 8bit game), its accurate collision detection and engaging level design. Anyone who first played a version of *Chuckie Egg* back in 1983 will attest to its sheer kinetic pace and energy. Jumping from platform to platform was transformed from the usual pedestrian leaps (even *Manic Miner* was inferior to *Chuckie Egg* in this respect) to incredibly nimble negotiation of the game's space. Leap from one platform to a moving lift and you just knew the distance and timing required to hit your mark. And avoiding hens by a hair's breadth by leaping onto the middle of a ladder, rather than having to negotiate it from its top or foot, was just one of the nuances which made *Chuckie Egg* such a tactile experience.







But the humble BBC Micro and Spectrum processors couldn't handle sophisticated physics – it was all a shorthand technique produced by calculating simple properties. "The thing that took me the longest was trying to get the landing on the platforms right," explains Anderson. "Depending on which level you were on, would you fall down or diagonally? The bouncing was interesting. It gave the impression that there were real physical laws in there. There are so many platform games where you fall off the edges of the platforms and you just went straight down. But in *Chuckie Egg* you fell in a proper arc. But it wasn't difficult to do. Just a few days' work. We had problems when you were approaching a couple of platforms at a strange angle and you could end up going through the other side. The collision in there was accurate as well."

Just a few weeks after seeing *Eggy Kong* for the first time, Anderson had completed his BBC Micro version of *Chuckie Egg* (Nigel Alderton developed the Spectrum version at the same time) and A&F Software was ready to put the game into production. "We were self published back then," recalls Anderson. "We had our own little factory unit and we had banks of cassette decks and we did our own duplication which included people sticking labels on everything. It cost about 50p to make the tape, we then sold it for five or six pounds. But there was VAT on top of that. The distributors took a bit. I think we got about 40 per cent in the end off the net price. [*Chuckie Egg*] never made a huge amount but it was a good steady earner for quite a long time because we kept putting it out on different machines: the Commodore and the Amstrad and the Dragon."

Unfortunately the cult following *Chuckie Egg* received couldn't keep A&F Software afloat and in 1985 the company went bust. When other development studios were being gobbled up by publishers, A&F struggled on meeting the demands of advertising rates and distribution prices, but to no avail. *Chuckie Egg* remains its most enduring title, and a supreme example of speed, simple design and a gentle learning curve combining to produce a piece of videogame magic which can never be traced among any number of sub-routines and integer arrays. A true Easter classic.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 45, May 1997

It might have been a plain idea – dark blue 'Mission: Impossible' branding on a sky blue background – but the right superstar can make anything sparkle. The glitter here came from Tom Cruise, a bit misleading considering he wouldn't actually make it into the game. "You wouldn't believe how sensitive he is about his image being used in any kind of commercial venture," moaned *Mission: Impossible*'s lead designer **Mark Rogers**. Given the quality of the finished product the veto was understandable, but **Edge** seemed excited enough, hinting at 3D visuals, an engrossing plot, and innovative gameplay. Hmm. Maybe they had it confused with the lead review, Rare's *Blast Corps*.

M:I aside, **E**45 painted a stellar future for gaming, with Alphas of *Zelda 64*, *Azel Panzer Dragoon RPG*, and a first glimpse of a little known Konami title. "*Metal Gear Solid* looks like it could be the surprise hit of the year (if it actually makes it to Europe)." **Edge** wrote. Snake arrived, of course, unburdened by hype, which brings us to the issue's highlight, a six-page interview with a superstar-in-waiting startup founder. Reset gives you John Romero, a retrospective in pictures.



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"If you've got a shit game, then it doesn't matter how big the licence is, it won't sell."
Gremlin's Steve McKevitt exhibits serious pre-*WWTBAM?* naivety.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"Perhaps TV addicts will sit down on a Saturday evening to watch the world's best gamers play *Quake* instead of watching muscle-bound buffoons lumbering about on 'Gladiators.'" After last month's snipe at the Spice Girls, **E**45 sees **Edge** turn TV critic.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Blast Corps (N64; 8/10), *Moto Racer* (PC; 8/10), *Interstate '76* (PC; 8/10), *X-Wing vs Tie Fighter* (PC; 9/10), *Terracide* (PC; 7/10), *Bushido Blade* (PS; 6/10), *Dragon Force* (Saturn; 8/10), *Sandwarriors* (PC; 7/10), *Doom 64* (N64; 7/10), *Xevious 3D* (PS; 7/10), *Speedster* (PS; 6/10)



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. "These are my boys from Ion Storm. And I guess that would make you my bitch, right?" 2. An actual screenshot from a pre-cel-shaded *Jet Set Romeradio* 3. "Ahh. Blue skies, cool slacks. Sweet. Can I make you my bitch now?" 4. Emotion Engine? That's so 2001. '97 is the year of the RomerEmotion engine: Tough 5. Sensitive 6. Having sex with a super hot model.

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Ian Livingstone, chairman at Eidos, takes a nostalgic trip back to Utopia





Utopia didn't have the best graphics in the world, but the rain cloud effects thrilled Mr Livingstone

I bought an Intellivision about 20 years ago (depressing age thought) because I wanted to play two games in particular. One was *Major League Baseball* which I played to death against Steve Jackson as we had both become fans of baseball on our many trips to the States during our Games Workshop days. But the game I enjoyed the most was *Utopia*. I have always loved management games and this was an early classic. The graphics were spectacularly mediocre but I didn't care as I tried to bring wealth and prosperity to the people on my island. The sound effects were equally poor but I still got excited as that rain cloud hissed across the screen in the general direction of my crops. Come on rain. There was plenty of stuff to build; houses, industry, fishing fleets, etc and plenty to worry about in the form of natural disasters and rebels. You can't help but think that *Utopia* must have had an influence on later management classics like *Civilisation* and *Sim City* as it was totally original at the time. Its designer was one Don Daglow. I wonder what happened to him?

FAQ

Tetsuya Mizuguchi

president and CEO, United Game Artists

After early successes such as *Sega Rally* and *Manx TT*, Mizuguchi-san's *Space Channel 5*, with its sassy space chick heroine Ulala, seemed positively outré. In retrospect it seems thoroughly restrained next to the bombastic aesthetic of *Rez*, but now the head of United Game Artists wants to turn his attention back towards reality, and particularly the new realities engendered by the adoption of Java wireless technology in Japan.

What was the first videogame you played?
Pong. When I was ten-years-old, round a friend's house. I was really surprised how the black and white graphics were elevated by the control system.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
Super Famicom.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
Sega Rally.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
I was involved in a computer graphics project within Sega in 1991, working on general production of CG.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
Do you remember *Xenon 2*? It's an amazingly impressive shooter.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
Metal Gear Solid. It's a very good game – very realistic. But there are long, long, cut-scenes, and you're not really playing the game. But it's a very good game.

"I can talk to people from other countries just by making games – breaking down cultural barriers that exist because of language"

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
I play whatever game we're making, which is a long time spent playing games, but not for enjoyment. I only really spend two or three hours playing games for pleasure.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Do you remember *R-360*? – it was like a big gyroscope. Wow.

What's your favourite book, album, and film of all time?
'Neuromancer' by William Gibson; The Beatles, 'The White Album'; and 'Paris, Texas'.

Which Website do you most regularly visit?
The UGA Website – because I write the diary every day.

Of all the games you've been involved with in the past, what's your favourite and why?
That's tough, but probably *Rez*. That was special to me. Or *Sega Rally*. I don't know. No, I'll stick with *Rez*.

What stage is your current project at?
I'm just thinking about what our next project is. It's probably going to be *Ulala*. We're going to change the design of the game, but we want to make the sequel. We have a lot of things to work on. Maybe we'll head towards more realistic stuff. That would mean I've come full circle in a way; my original goal was to make realistic graphics with *Sega Rally*, but then I moved away from that with *Rez*. I don't know, I'm just thinking about things.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
Communication.

What disappoints you about the videogame industry?
Prejudice. People playing games or viewing games in a prejudiced way. It's still a new media, but getting better.



What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
I like being interviewed by **Edge** like this. I'm not joking. I can talk to people from other countries just by making games. And that keeps getting better – breaking down cultural barriers that exist because of language.

Whose work do you most admire?
Miyamoto-san's. Because he's the oldest in the industry. He's showing that older people can make better games even though the industry's young. The game is a medium of experience. And he has the passion and much experience.

What current gaming platform have you been most impressed with?
PlayStation2, because of the experience of the emotion engine. Though I don't know the other platforms as well because I haven't had a chance yet. I'm really interested in the mobile phone. UGA is working with mobile companies in Japan, designing the communication – not games, but communication interfaces. That's really exciting.

Videogames: Art or Entertainment? (Discuss)
Entertainment. Why not? Games entertain people. *Rez* is also a game. We need some artistic sensibilities and skills, but games are designed to entertain.

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I've been a hardcore Nintendo fan since the days of the 8bit Famicom. I always stood by it, even with the half-arsed N64. I own the Nintendo consoles from the 8bit Famicom right through to the GameCube. But last week, my opinion started to change. As I was in the West End, I popped into CEX's retrogame shop (one of the only places left in the country where I can get my beloved Famicom and Super Famicom games). You can imagine how saddened I was to discover that Nintendo has stopped CEX from selling any imported Nintendo titles.

I can understand why it's stopped them from selling the GameCube and GBA titles, but to stop retro Nintendo games, most of which were never released in this country anyway, seems like a kick in the balls to hardcore Nintendo fans like me. It can't exactly be a lucrative business (selling the retro stuff), so why is Nintendo doing it? The only people who wanted to buy them were hardcore retrogamers anyway.

I had hoped, with the release of the GameCube, that Nintendo would stop its stuck-up attitude. What does it matter what we think anyway? We're just the people who buy the games.
D Halliday

I was quite amused to hear of grey imports when arriving in the UK. Coming from South Africa, we used to have an economy quite like the UK, where a lot of key industries are controlled or monopolised. I was quite surprised to find that it still happens here.

I am sure the history of this island will give some hints as how this happened, but I feel it seems it is quite a common practice for the haves to keep out the have nots. These monopolies and false economic barriers are not helping the economy of the UK. Sure it makes the marketplace easier to manage and analyse, but the chaos of an unrestricted marketplace can be more economically beneficial to all. In South Africa, 'grey imports' does not exist as a term anymore. Anyone who imports, can. All those shoddy retailers who relied on their protected market, are having a tough time keeping up with the young and aggressive new retailers who are offering better products at a cheaper price, and in some cases better service. And let's not mention all the small and informal companies that have been able to thrive. The consumer benefits most from getting their purchasing power back, by being able to choose where they spend their money. It has also had a knock-on effect of giving the consumers the confidence to voice opinions and complaints.

So I ask why that is not happening here? Why is industry and government keeping power from the consumer, and why are we not doing anything about it?
Gareth Qually

I write in response to Jay Smith's letter in **E**107. I agree with what he says about the possibility of games companies doing a dual release of a game with adult content removed as an appropriate way to increase revenue stream. This is a good idea and one which I'm sure would not put an overly increased load on the games companies.

What I can't agree with is that this should be done to help people out of a 'moral minefield'. The simple fact is, *GTAIII* which he was discussing is a game intended for those over 18, he should not have allowed an eight-year-old to play the game, regardless of what knowledge the child had of the game. There is no moral minefield, those under 18 should not be playing it – period. I don't agree with the idea of censorship be it for games, films, music whatever. I consider it my right as an adult to watch whatever I choose. However, I see no other option than to censor games when irresponsible 'adults' take such an approach as to allow such a young child to play such a violent game.
Paul Johnson

Edge's understanding is that Jay Smith didn't allow his friend's son to play *GTAIII* but persuaded him to sample *ISS* instead. Quite rightly, too.

I am a 39-year-old mpg (multi platform gamer) and it was with a small amount of curiosity that I pulled into Currys car park last Saturday morning after doing my shopping. I don't normally shop in Currys/Dixons, etc but was attracted by its large Xbox poster and had 15 minutes to kill.

As I walked through the lovely sliding door I was confronted by one of these large cardboard cut-out marketing things, you know the type, full-size Lara Croft, etc. This one was for Xbox and it was very large and very green (no surprise I suppose). What did surprise me was that it had a picture of Xbox and a list of its technical specs in big bold text. No mention of any actual games just the dull techy stuff on polygons, nVidia, etc. But no mention of games. I wandered into the store to be confronted by a large Xbox display made up of numerous empty boxes (God they are big) topped by a small portable TV showing a very poor video of *Halo*, it was out of focus and very poor quality. I was then aware of a young lad standing beside me (about 12–15-years-old) with his dad and his comment surprised me. "Dad it's so powerful." Not, "*Halo* looks cool," or, "Can't wait for *JSRF*." No he was more concerned about the machine itself. I was then assaulted by the "Can I help you?" man who spent 30 seconds telling me about the tech specs I'd read at the door. I countered with questions about the games to which he didn't have a clue except to tell me that if I pre-ordered today I'd get a free copy of **Edge** and "they can tell you all you need to know about the games."

I had the same experience in Dixons a few days later. Are we getting obsessed about tech specs and forgetting why we buy the damn machine in the first place? I've played *Halo* and this is why I want an Xbox not because it can shift x more polygons than a PS2, I want my PS2 to play *MGS2* and a GameCube to play *Pikmin*, this is the way it should be, is it not? My nine-year-old son told me a year or so ago I should bin my Dreamcast for a PS2 as it's got better 'graphs', needless to say he has been re-educated since.
Terry Charleton

"Are we getting obsessed about tech specs? I've played Halo and this is why I want an Xbox not because it can shift x more polygons than a PS2"



Never mind Terry Charleton's belief that we're all getting too obsessed with tech specs. Have you seen how many polys *Wreckless* throws around?

Would Phillip Ford (**E**107) eschew the classic animated feature 'Akira' in favour of the fully realised, three-dimensional pile of crap that was 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within'? Pardon that rushed analogy, but having a videogame (or even a film) exist in an overtly 2D aesthetic does not necessarily make the gaming world or its inhabitants any less believable. And of course, narrative and characterisation in videogames are just as important nowadays as visuals.

Not only has the newest iteration of *Zelda* seen a bold – and in my opinion, favourable – move forward stylistically, it has also managed to retain the essence of what makes Link's world so enchanting. Miyamoto-san's fresh depiction of this world, although cel-shaded and seemingly '2D', seems no more devoid of character and atmosphere then it did in its 64bit or even 16bit and 8bit incarnations. Or maybe it's just me.

I am not disputing over 9000 peoples' views, nor am I less inclined to interact with fully three-dimensional worlds (*Jak and Daxter* looks and sounds brilliant), but I would urge fans of the series to at least be patient; Nintendo's radical new departure may well grow on you. If not, maybe *Zelda*'s GameCube sequel will arrive sooner than expected.
Andrew Somerville

Re Philip Ford, and the other 9000 'passionate individuals' who dislike Link's new image – I think I understand. Let me explain. I've recently completed *Majora's Mask*, and while it doesn't have the 'wide-eyed wonder' of its prequel, its genius lies in its horror. There are genuine moments of darkness – witness a daughter tortured by her father's mutation (Gibdo mask), or simply let the time run out on the final day (just don't do anything important beforehand). Anyone who complains that Nintendo has too much child and not enough adult simply isn't paying attention.

And then a cartoon Link, complete with manga stylings, is unveiled, and every criticism you've defended since the days of the NES, that Nintendo makes toys, not computers, is thrown back in your face. I sympathise. I really do.

But think about it. If you'd seen *Majora's Mask* running, mid-game, for the first time, what would you think? With its funny-faced characters and oh-so-cute squarks and squeaks of Link as a Goron or Deku Shrub, you'd assume it was aimed at children. And perhaps it is. Read 'The Happy Prince' or any tales by the Brothers Grimm lately? Children welcome darkness.

My point is, just as darkness is most prominent when surrounded by light, or horror most striking when encompassed by beauty, so an adult theme might be most effective when written into a childlike narrative. Oh yeah, and if you did take Mr Miyamoto aside for that 'quiet word', I fear he would wait for you to finish, smile (hopefully with indulgence, rather than annoyance) and say, "And that is why I create games, and you do not."
Jude Nicholas

It was disappointing to learn that Codemasters had chosen some obscure Labour politician to star in *Operation Flashpoint*. There are plenty of 'distinguished older gentleman' in our own industry able to orchestrate 50 missions.
Roger Bennett, ELSPA

After further consideration (and several extra levels), I have decided that your review score for *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* was probably correct. While my time is currently employed with other PC projects, a classic game should be able to tempt me back with the quality of its gameplay. Sadly, this doesn't appear to be the case with *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*. When I finally did force myself to play a few more levels, I realised that I wasn't enjoying the experience anywhere near as much as I had hoped. In fact, I was rather disappointed to realise that *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*'s gameplay is rather basic, involving nothing more challenging than following a rather linear path while disposing of any enemies that appear along the way.

One particular problem that annoyed me (and stopped me progressing for at least half an hour) happened on level 9 (the Supply Compound). The mission briefing states clearly that the last guard shouldn't be killed, otherwise the level can't be finished. What is also obvious is that if this same guard is alerted before all of the other soldiers are killed, then the level *still* can't be completed. Attempting to avoid this eagle's gaze when in Alert mode is like trying to destroy Castle Wolfenstein single handedly... with a knife. It took me ages to realise that I would have to replay the level from an earlier save point (and avoid alerting this particular guard). Luckily I save frequently, but silly little things like this shouldn't happen.

The next level in the rocket base should have been more exciting, but this was one of the most 'on rails' linear levels that I have ever played in any FPS. It was far too easy (despite the considerable number of soldiers), but the most important point to make is that it just wasn't interesting.

After these negative experiences, I am finding it difficult to get myself interested enough to keep playing. As I stated above, my PC time is occupied at the moment with other projects, and with more enticing game prospects on the horizon (*Unreal II*, *Jedi Knight II* and *Star Trek: Bridge Commander*), *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* is starting to look more like a six out of ten every day. In fact, it is now only too clear that **Edge** magazine is the only place where I can find honest reviews of the latest games. How many other magazines would have given *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (or *Medal of Honor* for that matter) anything less than a nine?
Chris Low

Next month you'll be saying we overrated it...

I was playing the *Metal Gear Solid 2* demo supplied with the 'Official Playstation2' magazine the other day when a worrying thought struck me about where the videogaming industry could be heading.

"Not only has the newest iteration of Zelda seen a bold move forward stylistically, it has also managed to retain the essence of what makes Link's world so enchanting"



Gavin Eke is distressed at the chance that the near future will bring with it endless *MGS2* clones. If only all developers had that kind of cash…

This thought had struck me while playing *Metal Gear Solid* on the PSone, however, it seemed even more appropriate now. It seems that the videogaming industry (in relation to home computers/consoles) has always had something to look up to. In the '80s and the first half of the '90s it was the coin-op industry. Every man and his dog would try and bring the perfect arcade conversion into the public's home, whether it was *OutRun* on a humble Spectrum or *Street Fighter II* on the SNES.

However, since the coin-op industry has fallen by the wayside due to spiraling production costs to stay ahead of home console technology, it seems that the film industry has becomes its new holy grail.

I was never a fan of *MGS* on the PSone, because of the constant interruptions from cut-scenes and the radio messages which seemed laborious in the extreme. However, I thought I would give *MGS2* a fair chance and see what it was like. To my dismay, what appeared were yet more (longer) cut-scenes and the same interruptions that appeared in its previous incarnation.

There is no doubt that *MGS2* is a game trying to be a film, but I can't help feeling that this is not the direction videogaming should be heading. Films are meant to be watched in the thirdperson, there is little to no interaction between you and the film. However, games are designed for interaction in mind. You are supposed to interact with them and witness your affect on the game world in which you are present.

MSG2 frustrated and alienated me at the same time as I watched one long cut-scene to the next until I finally got to the game itself. I feel that *MSG2* sets a worrying precedent to other publishers in that it is seen as a high profile game which is supposed to be setting the standard.

The question is, is this the standard the videogame industry should be following. I certainly hope not as more and more developers/publishers turn to cut-scenes to fill out their games.

If I want to sit somewhere to watch a plot-driven story I will go to the cinema or watch a video. If I want to be immersed in a world I can directly influence and enjoy then I will play a videogame. Thank goodness for the Game Boy Advance!

Gavin Eke

MGS2's style of play won't please everyone, just as the immediacy (and purity) of *Tempest 3K* is likely to leave many players wondering what the appeal is. Yet both have their place. To regard *MGS2* as videogaming's only future is unrealistic (if only from a commercial perspective). It just forms part of a diverse catalogue of gaming experiences, which is surely a good thing, isn't it?

So it seems that the Nintendo-bashing from **Edge** is set to continue, even when the company release good news. Over the past four months or so, **Edge** appears to have been on a mission to praise and hype all things (X)box shaped, while taking every available opportunity to knock Nintendo for its perceived lack of interest in the European marketplace (plus anything else that it could dredge up from the Internet rumour mill and then present as 'fact' inside the magazine itself).

Just for the record, I too believe that previously Nintendo has shown a distinct lack of enthusiasm in Europe, and you are correct in raising this issue. However, does it really warrant such a consistent attack on all aspects of the company? Even little sly digs in the Continue/Quit and Datastream sections recently have not gone unnoticed by myself and fellow admirers of your supposedly impartial publication.

This month is no exception either: The news that Nintendo has now given details on its full European launch was given good 'airtime', but then it seems you deemed it worthy to even the score by devoting the entire lead-in to the pre-screen section with an attack on the company based on what **Edge** even called, "pretty extreme rumour", "unbelievable almost".

How does **Edge** justify this piece of 'news' which is nothing more at this point in time than Internet gossip? Surely you could have used this space to discuss some 'real' issues? So come on **Edge**, we all know you liked *Halo* and that Nintendo doesn't bow down and treat you like the pretentious games bible you seem to think you have become. Can't we just all move on?

Tony Banks

No, we can't. Not until Nintendo has convinced us that it *really* means business in Europe. The release date, the price, the quantity/diversity of launch games, the RGB and PAL60 modes are all welcome, obviously, but **Edge** is still worried about what follows (just as the second wave of Xbox titles has been more than a little worrying). When it comes to capturing a sizeable chunk of the games-playing market, NCL's 'quality over quantity' ethos, while admirable in principle, has failed convincingly in practice beforehand (the N64's limited catalogue contained poor titles, too).

Edge isn't anti-Nintendo (see **E**1–109) but will happily criticise the company's approach until it takes our continent as seriously as both Sony and Microsoft do. And we do it not because we have some pathetic alliance to any one company in particular (games matter, not hardware), but rather because ultimately we want to see videogames achieve as high a penetration as possible and it's infuriating to see Nintendo seemingly content to undersell itself in the European market. We do it because we genuinely believe Euro gamers deserve better (we all use NTSC Nintendo consoles so it hardly affects us). We do it because **Edge**'s 'sit back and wait' approach didn't work last time around.

As for the Prescreen Intro 'news' piece you refer to, its running is justified in the fact that it wasn't in the news section, it was clearly labelled as rumour (which came from several sources) and whether true or not, represented an opportunity for interesting editorial. We could all sit here and just reprint press releases, you know.

"There is no doubt that Metal Gear Solid 2 is a game trying to be a film, but I can't help feeling that this is not the direction videogaming should be heading"





Cooked ponders the obvious significance of the *Gran Turismo* series for the car industry while *Super Monkey Ball* gets involved in joypad design issues

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (www.futureforums.co.uk/edge/)

Topic: **Too much control?**
Poster: **Harlen Quinn**
The inspiration for this thread is the lovely *Halo* and my infatuation with its multiplayer aspect. I happen to think the old Xbox controller is just fine and works better in practice than many might expect. This led me to thinking about the old mouse/keyboard superiority debate. It's true that competing against someone using such a user interface compared to that of the humble joypad, there's only going to be one winner. The mouse jockey, in case you weren't sure. But is the movement allowed via the twin sticks more realistic? Well yes, in my opinion it is; no whizzing round 1,000s of degrees here. So does the mouse/keyboard method allow too much unrealistic control over what is quite often a human character?

Poster: **Witchfinder General**
And what, pray tell, does realism have to do with good gameplay? 'Realistic' games are often the ones that are frustrating and badly designed.

Poster: **Phatboy**
Quite a lot if it's *Microsoft Flight Simulator*.

Poster: **l.i.n.k.s.t.e.r**
I'm with the 'who cares about realism' lobby on this one. I think *Halo* works well but it's obviously been slowed down to compensate – which isn't a criticism. *Quake*, however, is a different kettle of fish. The speed with which you can turn makes reacting and trouncing someone with a rocket mid-flight a joy. They're just different games optimised for different systems, each with their own merits if you ask me.

Topic: **Arcades, is anyone still playing them?**
Poster: **Syntax Error**
Who actually is still playing these things? Now, I am heavily into gaming and love it to death. However coming from Brighton were there is no shortage of arcades to visit, I feel absolutely no compulsion to go in whatsoever. Why is this? Tacky disco balls hanging from the ceiling, your Kappa shellsuit crew taking residence and the purple rinse brigade filling up the slot machines. And the fact that home systems have bridged the gap to such an extent that most people would rather play from the comfort of their own home than spend it with the puffy jacket brigade? But though I have little love for arcades, I'd be sad to see them go. Not so much for what they provide at the moment but for what they could be.

Topic: **GT3. Cultural importance?**
Poster: **Cooked**
Did any one else read the article in a recent edition of 'Evo' that was discussing the significance of *Gran Turismo 3*? The thrust of the article was the enormous significance of the *GT* series to car manufacturers. The writer stated that *GT* had done more for motor sports and the car industry then any film, any magazine or any television show ever. Apparently the *GT* franchise is now considered more valuable than most films, and the release of a new *GT* game is more lucrative than the release of a new U2 album. He then went on to discuss how *GT* has affected the perception of car manufacturers. The reluctance of European manufacturers to cooperate has resulted in a whole generation who now dream about owning an Impreza or Skyline just as much as a Ferrari. I think all of us who have played *GT* can remember how it changed your perception of cars. Who would buy a BMW over a Skyline now?

Poster: **rafaqat**
Wonder if they'll ever let Polyphony do car damage in future iterations.

Poster: **wiseguy**
I've worked on racing games and we've had cars that appeared in *GT* and always been allowed to damage them. In fact there are loads of games all with loads of *GT* cars, which can all be damaged.

Poster: **Lancashire Bambaata**
But if one manufacturer says you can't damage their cars, you can't damage any, can you?

Topic: **Is the PS2's controller to blame?**
Poster: **bear**
First things first, I like the DualShock design. Unfortunately, some of my fears upon learning about Sony's decision to stick with the design for the PS2 have come to pass. Most games on the PS2 seem like little more than graphical updates of PSone games.The change in game design facilitated by the hardware has not happened and maybe the controller is to blame.

Poster: **Tito Juentez**
I think you could be right. Developers have yet to embrace analogue in the way they did for N64 and DC. *GT3* on the DualShock has incredibly limited control compared to the DC's *F355 Challenge*. Another example is *PES*, where the stick offers no analogue control whatsoever. Is this an example of developers dumbing the control down to suit a mass market or is the DualShock simply not up to the job?

Poster: **Squitle**
I don't think so, bear. At the end of the day, *Monkey Ball* is fairly innovative and uses just the analogue stick (mini games not counting), so the design of the pad had little to do with the design of this game. I think it just comes down to lazy games designers, and men in suits just churning out boring averageware that, with the PS2's huge user base will sell enough to return a profit.

"Apparently the GT franchise is now considered more valuable than most films, and the release of a new GT game is more lucrative than the release of a new U2 album"

Next month






Superman: The Man of Steel (Xbox)
page 034

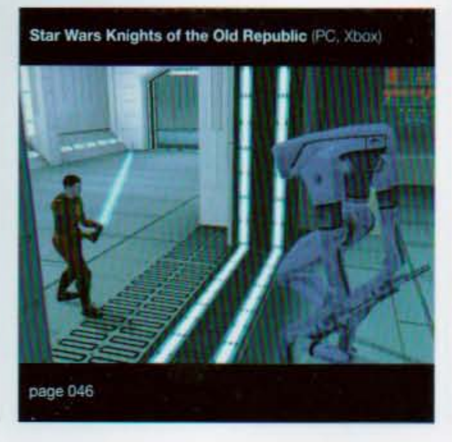

Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller (Xbox)
page 048


Die Hard: Vendetta (GC)
page 036


Tekki (Xbox)
page 039



Downforce (PS2)
page 042


Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic (PC, Xbox)
page 046



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